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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF
GAMES DEVELOPMENT
GATHERING THE GREATEST
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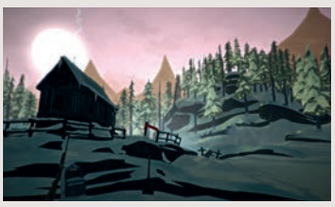
GUERRILLA GAMES
STUDIO OF THE YEAR

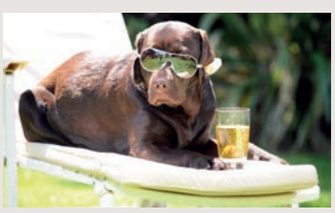
DEVELOP AWARDS ■ MOSS ■ DEVELOPING BEYOND

AT A GLANCE

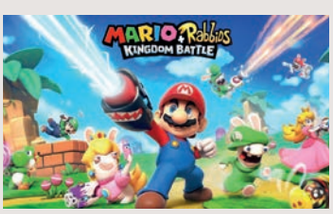


JULY 31ST
THE LONG DARK (PS4)
PlayStation owners can finally see if they can survive in the snow

AUGUST 15TH
SONIC MANIA
Yes, one of us has paid £80 for the statue of Sonic. Guess who?



AUGUST 28TH
BANK HOLIDAY
This is it, your last one for the year. We hope it's a fun one!



AUGUST 29TH
MARIO + RABBIDS: KINGDOM BATTLE
Mario ands Rabbids mixed with turn-based strategy? We can't wait!

DIARY DATES

devcom developer conference

DEVCOM 2017
August 20th, Koelnmesse, Cologne, Germany
devcom.global

AUGUST

Casual Connect USA 2017
August 1st - 3rd, various venues, Seattle, Washington, USA
usa.casualconnect.org

Gamescope 2017
August 17th - 19th, Aalborg, Denmark
gamescope.dk

Respawn Gathering of Game Developers 2017
August 20th, Koelnmesse, Cologne, Germany
respawngathering.com

SEPTEMBER

DICE Europe 2017
September 10th - 12th, various venues, Cascais, Portugal
diceeurope.com

Pocket Gamer Connects Helsinki 2017
September 19th - 20th, Wahna Satama, Helsinki, Finland
pgconnects.com/helsinki

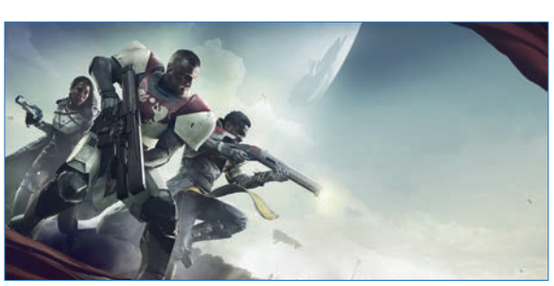
EGX 2017
September 21st - 24th, NEC Birmingham, England
egx.net/egx

EVENT SPOTLIGHT

GAMESCOM 2017
Where: Koelnmesse, Cologne, Germany
When: August 23rd - 28th
What: Europe's biggest trade event where businnes and consumers can see the newest games
www.gamescom-cologne.com

COMING SOON

DEVELOP #186
THE LOCALISATION AND QA ISSUE
They are two of the biggest parts of the games industry but so often are they overlooked. This issue we look at the disciplines and talk to the leaders in the fields



DEVELOP #187
SEPTEMBER 2017
It's the start of what the games journalism sector likes to call the 'silly season'. With big releases all vying to be played, we'll continue to get the best news and interviews

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DEVELOP AWARDS 2017 WINNERS
The votes are in! See all the winners of the Develop Awards 2017 and read the thoughts of those who won

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A WHOLE NEW WORLD
From Bungie to VR, Jem Alexander speaks to Playtec's Chris Alderson about new VR game, Moss

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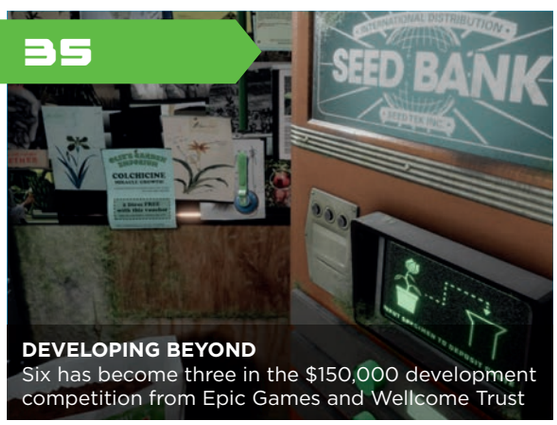

DEVELOPING BEYOND
Six has become three in the $150,000 development competition from Epic Games and Wellcome Trust

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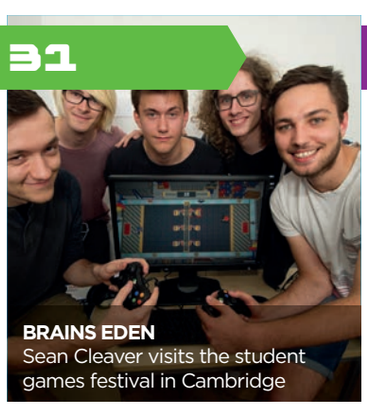

BRAINS EDEN
Sean Cleaver visits the student games festival in Cambridge

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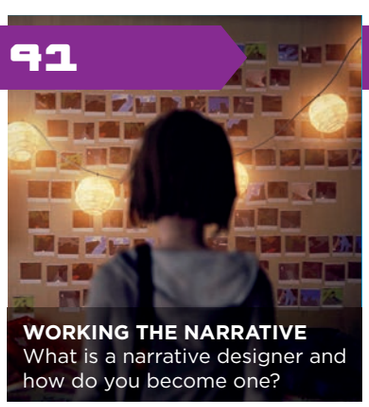

WORKING THE NARRATIVE
What is a narrative designer and how do you become one?

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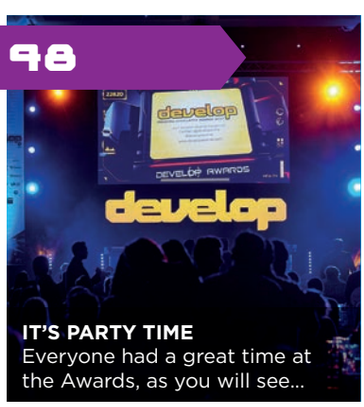

IT'S PARTY TIME
Everyone had a great time at the Awards, as you will see...

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Editorial

Last night I ate a silk worm. It was dead inside its chrysalis, and tasted of crispy pork and potato, and yet I did not eat another. I am beaming this missive over to the UK from Shanghai, where it is very warm and sleep is either rare or ineffectual.

The fruits of this trip aren't present within this issue of the magazine, you'll have to wait for next month for that. In the meantime, let's talk about the incredible Develop Awards that took place just a few weeks ago. (Jeez, was it only a few weeks ago?)

It was both a pleasure and an honour to host my first Develop Awards in Brighton this month. A big thank you to everyone who showed up, the atmosphere was fantastic and the feedback so far has been overwhelming. It's humbling to see so much talent in one room.

> **Talent makes the game development world go round and is the most vaulable thing you can offer**

'Talent' has been something of a theme out here in China. The hunt for talent. The importance of talent. The scarcity. Talent makes the game development world go round and, along with your passion for your work and for games, is the most valuable thing you can offer the entire global games industry.

The Develop Awards winners, along with everyone shortlisted, are among the top tier of that industry. Congratulations to you all. I'll see you next year!

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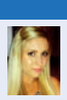
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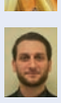
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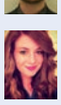
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MARKET CRASH

The only times that Crash Bandicoot isn't top of the UK game retail charts is when it's out of stock. **Jem Alexander** considers what this means for remasters vs fresh, modern games that don't sell quite as well

What does it mean when a collection of remastered games from the 90s has one of the strongest opening weeks of the year? *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy* has surprised everyone with its fantastic sales figures. No doubt that includes people at both Sony and Activision, who may have seen the remakes as little more than fanservice, rather than an actual money-spinner.

Only in the last few weeks has the game been back in stock on Amazon in the UK and its return to store shelves has seen it hit the UK No.1, once more, blocking *Splatoon 2* from the top spot in its debut week. Crash has been tricky to get hold of, unless you're willing to fork out £50 for the privilege. And I'm under no illusion that there are many that did pay that extra money to get hold of it. Vicarious Visions' cosmetic overhaul of the three titles is fantastic, sure, but you're still paying for 20 year old gameplay mechanics. Were games simply better back then?

Of course not. There have been two decades of design evolution since *Crash Bandicoot*'s original release in 1996. In fact, development of the original *Crash* started before *Mario 64* released and established many of our 3D platformer best-practices. 360' movement? Analogue sticks? Seeing where you're going? Who needs 'em. *Crash Bandicoot* was Naughty Dog's take on what a 3D platformer could look like, and it looks a lot like a 2D platformer. Just with more edges.

> **Maybe it's time to make a triple-A platformer with levels and lives and no cohesive story**

My point is that the *Crash Bandicoot* collection didn't outsell *Horizon Zero Dawn* because it's a better gameplay experience. Nostalgia has a lot to answer for. But can nostalgia alone really fuel such high sales for a game? The fact is, despite the Crash games being so ancient, they still play fantastically. In that super-janky, almost-broken way that 90s games did.

So what lessons can be learnt here? Besides the almost imminent announcement of a *Spyro The Dragon* HD Collection, I mean? The nostalgia mines will never run dry, because as soon as we've spent 15 years re-releasing all of our favourite games of yesteryear, it'll be time to do it all over again. *Crash Bandicoot* in 2035 in 8K super-surround VR, anyone? Plus, by then it will be *Horizon*'s turn for its second go around.

SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

Maybe it's time to make a triple-A platformer with levels and lives and no cohesive story. Not a remake of an old game, but more of a spiritual successor. Developers have tried it with middling success. *Mighty No.9* and *Yooka-Laylee* sought to recapture, respectively, *Mega Man* and *Banjo Kazooie's* success, but sales of these games were relatively mediocre

Certainly neither of them hit the UK number one for multiple weeks (which, admittedly, isn't a fantastic metric to judge these things by). Both titles were developed by key team members who worked on the games that inspired them. So are the devs the ones out of touch, or are the players? And just how does *Crash Bandicoot* fit into all of this?

It's sad to think that publishers might look at HD remakes as more of a sure bet than a freshly designed, modern experience. But at the same time, there must be a decent chunk of those *Crash* purchasers who hadn't played it before and bought a copy off the back of the hype. So for those people, it is fresh and new. Nintendo has done similarly with *Splatoon*. Sure, the Switch version is a 'sequel', but many missed it the first time around.

So how many times are we going to buy the same games with slightly sharper graphics? Probably a few more, and maybe that's okay. Who knows, perhaps some of those modern games that didn't do so well on their first outing will sell like Crash cakes when they get remade in ten years. Just add nostalgia.

All I know is that we need an *Onimusha* HD collection. Yes, that's my big takeaway from all of this. It's my takeaway from most things, if I'm honest. ■

PRESS X TO FINISH

Often derided as passive gameplay, are quick time events and button prompts actually a wonderful and emotional way to the close a story? **Sean Cleaver** recalls his experiences with relinquishing control in finales

It's no secret that emotional moments become even more poingant when the drama hangs in the air. I remember the end of David Tennant's tenure in *Doctor Who*. The swell of the orchestra as the countertenor constantly sings 'goodbye' in Latin, the camera pans to Tennant's face and there's a pause, the longest pause until his final words. Then I am on the floor in a puddle of tears in the foetal position.

These moments occur in games too and for me, one of the the best ways to convey them is a technique so often criticised – a quick time event.

I DON'T WANT TO GO

I have to thank developer Rami Ismail for inspiring this piece with the conclusion of his 'Mom vs *FFXV*' Twitter thread. Rami's mother had never played a game and over the last few months has been playing through *Final Fantasy XV*. The conclusion of her experience a few weeks back reminded me of my own journey with the game and how I didn't want it to end. I started *FFXV* with apprehension. I saw the movie and was a little bit underwhelmed. I've never been a fan or player of the series to date so why would I not be apprehensive?

However, after several hours things began to make sense and it was one moment in that game that engaged me. Sitting above a garage, Prompto talked about his past with Noctis and let his guard down. Through this, I caved. I rewatched the movie, I watched the anime and when the time came to end the journey, I realised I was saying goodbye to all of these characters I've grown to love.

> **The euphoria is mixed with the pain of letting go of the experience**

I've had the big battles, I've parted with my companions and at the very end I have no choice. I have one button to press – X. I don't want to. I know I have to but I don't want to. This is nearly 100 hours of investment and it's all summed up in this one final press of a button. I sit in front of the screen, controller on the floor working up the courage to press it. After what seems like eternity, I press X.

The euphoria of finishing the game is mixed with the pain of letting go of the experience and believing that what you did was best for that world. The tone of the music makes for a powerful and happy conclusion. Dawn has broken and you did good.

IS THERE A CHOICE?

I remembered other games where a button, even if it is a choice, heralds the end of your time with a game. *Life is Strange* asks you, the player... Nay, asks you, Max, to make an impossible choice. Giving up love for the sake of saving lives. You know what the right choice is, as does Max. For those final moments, you are her. This is the end and at the press of a button, the worst thing that has ever happened to you will happen – but it needs to happen.

Many games will not give you a chance to make a decision. *Halo 4* is a good example where a QTE plays out to get you to an end so that you don't miss out on the cinematics. Much like *FFXV*, there isn't a choice. *Life is Strange*, however can only subjectively end one way. It's a choice you see coming a mile off and definitely don't want to make. But you have to. So the game gives you those moments to pause, reflect and finally commit to the shattering conclusion you chose.

RELINQUISHING CONTROL

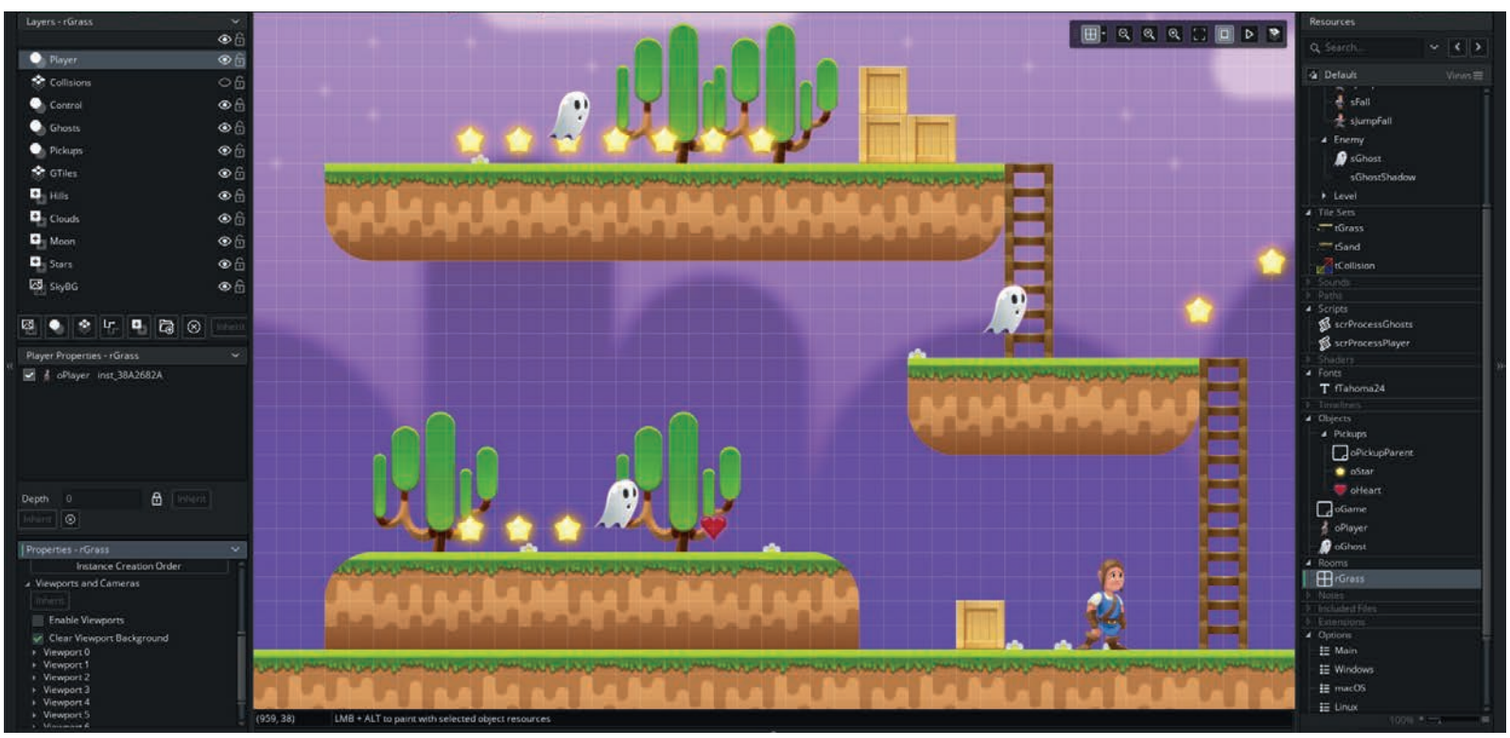
Dramatic pauses are normally used to hieghten the tension before the reveal of a piece. Games can give you the option to control the length but really, do you control it? Or do you just use the time to come to terms with the inevitable and press X?

Games so often are about controlling the action, but these moments are about surrendering to the experience. Without giving back control to the game and allowing the story to run its course, we can never look back and appreciate the journey.

Relinquishing control and encouraging reflection is a joy, especially when you've played 70+ hours of a game. We don't want an end, but we know we must. ■

MAKING GAMES **SHOULD BE FUN**

It's no secret that some parts of game development can be stressful. But there are ways to make the development process much more fun. **James Cox**, general manager of YoYo Games, has some top tips



Creating games is very rewarding, but it can also be tough. Inventing and developing a game can be difficult. When you add questions about funding, distributing, marketing, discoverability and competition, it can get really tough. However, these things shouldn't stop us from having fun during development. Certainly, these things do not prevent that amazing feeling we get when we see our games in a digital store or on a shelf.

"Ok," you may say. "A great feeling at the end is good, but how do I have more fun along the way?" Well, as with most things in life, there are plenty of options. Here's some of the ones I've discovered on my journey through the games industry, often learnt from my colleagues and friends.

1. GET FEEDBACK ON YOUR GOOD IDEAS

There's no substitute for good ideas, but game ideas can be rather subjective. Subsequently, having your great inventions shot down by others can be difficult to accept. However, when we get feedback we should look for the reasoning and interesting points in any criticism. This will help us iterate on our ideas to make them even better. A key point here is getting feedback as early as possible. Developing great ideas is good fun, reworking months of development effort is certainly not.

2. WORK WITH GOOD PEOPLE

Good ideas are always needed, but without good people those ideas can't materialise. Whether we're making a game on our own or working as part of a team, everyone needs to be talented at what they do. It's good to find out what everyone's talents are and what they enjoy doing. Learning new things to improve our skills is also great. Transferring a job to the right person can work wonders. Maybe even drop a feature if the talent is not available. With good people working on the right things, making great games is a lot more enjoyable.

3. THE RIGHT TOOLS

Picking the right tools is very important. Using a good tool will save time and make development more pleasant. The most important aspect here is picking the right tool for the right job. Some tools specialise in 2D and others in 3D. Some tools cater to certain genres and others to different parts of the game making pipeline. Most often a combination of tools will be best. Even on the smallest hobby project some research into what tools to use is time well spent. After all, painting your wall with a toothbrush would not be much fun, whereas one of those paint spray guns is awesome.

> **Developing great ideas is good fun, reworking months of effort is not**

As we develop and sell software for making 2D games, it's no surprise that we'd recommend some tools. Good tools are discussed and recognised across our industry including several tool categories in the Develop Awards. This year we won the Design & Creativity Tool Award for our GameMaker Studio 2 software. We routinely use other people's tools as well as our own and they make our development more efficient. So, a big thank you to all the tool makers out there for making the games industry more fun for us all.

4. SCOPE FOR A GOOD WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Designing our games to be achievable while maintaining a sensible work-life balance is key. We need to say no sometimes, to others and to ourselves. Achieving a good work-life balance can have a direct impact on productivity. How many of us have worked on a bug unsuccessfully all day, only to come in refreshed the next day and solve the bug in ten minutes?

Ambition is great and necessary but not at the cost of failure. Working on a game in development forever or having a game cancelled because it's too late is definitely not fun. Making a select set of high quality features, well that is a lot of fun.

I strongly believe the joy we have making games will shine through in our finished products. If we have fun making something then chances are people out there will enjoy playing it. And, most importantly, wherever our journey takes us at least we had fun along the way. ■

NARRATIVE DESIGN: WHY AND WHEN?

Writer **Greg Buchanan** and Linx Agency's **Benjamin Ryalls**, look at why your project needs a writer earlier

The games industry has a narrative problem. The question will be familiar to anyone working in narrative design: why? Why do we need a writer on our project, and why now?

Frequently game designers, programmers, and other creatives at a studio create a game's story elements by themselves, with a writer potentially brought in to polish and expand the game's text at a later date. Sometimes this is fine, especially for games where narrative is not a central component of the intended player experience. Sure, many studios will recognise that the hypothetical presence of a writer earlier in the process might benefit this element, but why hire someone that early when there seems to be little work to do?

Yet all too often, writers are parachuted in to try and rescue the story, text, and narrative components of games in the late stages of a projects development.

Even a few days consultancy early in that project, combined with ongoing and periodic support, might have allowed that writer to save the company development time, help build more coherency between narrative and gameplay systems, and increase the overall probability of higher review scores.

This is particularly the case where art or cinematic pipelines are involved, where writers may be able to point out issues and opportunities relating to genre, the cast of characters, drama, and diversity concerns that many studios may not be aware of. Due to their nature as external freelancers, game writers are often able to provide critique and feedback far beyond even their role as story champion, questioning development and production assumptions that those too close to the project might be blind towards.

The late-stage use of writers from outside of the games industry, such as television or film, can add to this problem, particularly if they work in isolation from more experienced game writers. Although their writing ability may be excellent, these writers may lack the knowledge of gameplay systems, production pipelines, and development processes required to be able to make the last-minute narrative improvements so often necessary.

> **High quality writing does not need to be the province of a select few titles**

Ironically, films, television, comics, and any number of other media work on the basis of the story coming first. The pitch, and then script, all come before the construction of sets, the arrival of actors, the addition of special effects.

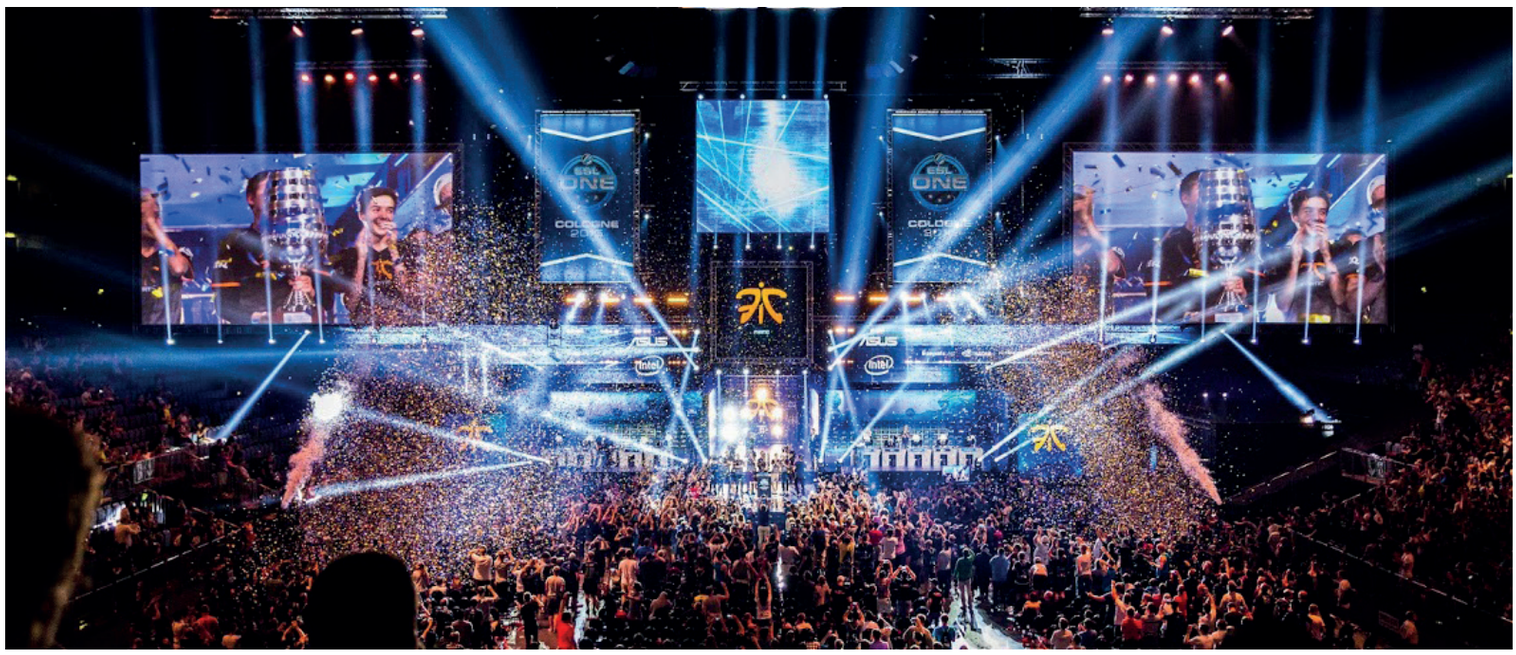
In cases where scripts were produced late in production like *Suicide Squad*, review scores dropped, just as they do in games. Writers from other media are hired due to success in projects where they were allowed to thrive and help guide production. The games industry could gain much from reflecting on their process similarly.

Video game narratives can be excellent. The success of titles such as *The Witcher 3* and *The Last of Us* demonstrates this, driving critical acclaim, sales, and player engagement. But high quality writing and narrative design does not need to be the province of those select few titles. Almost every game can have a great narrative, from the briefest glimmer of tutorial text to the most epic cinematic.

All we need is for writers to be brought on early in the process, given the tools they need to do the job, and for the industry to appreciate good writing as a key ongoing component for the success of a project, not as a last minute task. ■

Benjamin Ryalls is the Founder and Creative Director of the Linx Agency, the world's leading game writers agency. He has almost a decade's experience in the games industry working with companies such as Ubisoft, CD Projekt RED, Capcom, and Square Enix.

Greg Buchanan is represented by the Linx Agency, having worked as narrative designer on upcoming PSVR titles The Inpatient and Bravo Team, as writer for indie games Paper Brexit and Paper Drumpf, and as of early 2017, No Man's Sky, among other titles.



THE CASE FOR DATA IN **ESPORTS**

Esports games and their players generate a lot of data for developers. DC Labs visualisation and data analytics experts **Florian Block** and **Anders Drachen** talk about how we can put this data to even better use

Whenever you play a game of *Dota 2*, *League of Legends* or any other esports game, your behaviour and that of your teammates is recorded in great detail. The data is stored in replay files and made accessible online, providing us with the opportunity to not only visualise and analyse what is going on during matches, but also to dive into the action post-match at a level that is unprecedented outside of esports.

Imagine if physical sports had the kind of detailed tracking that takes place in a digital game – it would revolutionise sports analytics. For many games such as *Dota 2*, we even have VR viewing modes that literally put you as observer in the playing field during match runtime.

The amount of data being generated from esports matches is huge. For instance, *Dota 2* generates detailed gameplay data for over a million matches per day. Every single player action from all of these games can be download by the esports community, to analyse. The sheer size of data involved puts games on par with other big data accumulating fields like astronomy and finance.

While the data is available and the esports community has a growing appetite to engage with data, there are not many good tools around for working with it.

> **The vast majority of the esports community is reliant on a few analysis providers and tools**

If you are a professional team or a major broadcaster you may have an analyst working for you, dissecting matches and providing detailed analysis. However, the vast majority of the 320 million-strong esports community is reliant on a few analysis providers and the tools built into the game clients.

Current esports games have made great strides in providing great visualisation of metrics during and after matches. But, in terms of actual analysis of in-game performance, or the ability to share data and visualisations, we still have a long way to go.

This problem is one of the key areas for us at Digital Creativity Labs (DC Labs) and the Centre for Intelligent Games and Game Intelligence (IGGI). DC Labs is the largest games research centre in the world, with over 30 scientists and dozens of PhD students, all working on games technology. Together with tournament organisers, broadcasters, teams, coaches and others from esports, we are working on democratising the access to analytical tools and techniques to help anyone extract value from gameplay data. This ranges from data platforms such as Dotabuff and OpenDOTA, developers who want to understand player behaviour, streamers and youtubers to improve their coverage, all the way to our kids who want to share their stats with friends and maybe pick up some maths and data science along the way.

These challenges cover lot of different stakeholders with varied needs and requirements. To develop solutions that are flexible, and tailored to non-experts, you need to think about adaptive interfaces. Within AI and user experience research, the notion of using AI assistants to work with the user directly to help with tasks is particularly interesting.

We are also exploring recommender systems that assist with data analysis, interpretation and generation of data-driven stories. In this context, machine learning has some exciting new application areas, such as automatically detecting 'entertaining' bits of gameplay among vast numbers of games, providing creative suggestions for data-driven commentary and providing on the fly coverage that intelligently adapts to a viewer's preference.

These techniques could also radically transform production workflows in esports, especially allowing low-staffed, low-budget productions achieve a professional-grade quality of coverage. From the perspective of the player, being able to access your own data along with the ability to analyse and compare it with others, with AI assistants that help you improve, is of recurrent interest.

While physical sports are still far away from realising those levels of data analytics, esports provide a fertile ground for innovation in this space that is ready for harvest right now. In the future we think we can expect a plethora of tools becoming available that make it fun and engaging to interact with esports data. ■

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QUIZZED IN

develop Quiz 2017

In association with Testronic

The Develop Quiz 2017, in association with Testronic, was a great night out during the Develop Conference in Brighton. **Develop** recounts the night and, in case you missed it, we've put a few teasers for you below too

Brighton-based Studio Gobo went home with the plaudits after winning in the Develop Quiz 2017. In association Testronic, the quiz tested the gaming knowledge of competing teams including Unity, Aardvark Swift, Amiqus and GamesAid.

Celebrated Brighton comedy venue, the Komedia, hosted the event, which featured five rounds of challenging questions and some fierce rivalries.

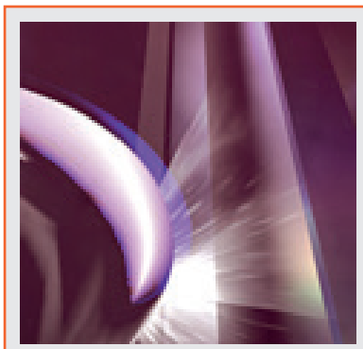
Develop deputy editor Sean Cleaver handled quiz master duties (although remind him not to do any more *Overwatch* impressions – Ed), and everyone chose some interesting team names. Two teams even had the same team name and pun, which we can't repeat here but you know who you are.

Contestants started with a picture round where they had to guess the game followed by a recap of the last twelve months in gaming, between the two conferences – Develop 2016 and Develop 2017.

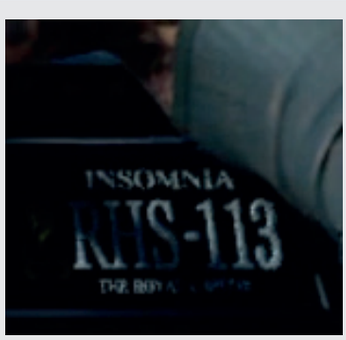
A round on the history of the games industry came next, before a quote round where contestants either had to guess who said the quote, or what game the quote was from. The quiz finished up with the music round playing theme music from games from the last year.

IDespite there being no questions about *Love Island*, it was a tough quiz. It was the local team of Studio Gobo (with another team name that we can't repeat here) that went away with the respect of their peers and two bottles of the Komedia's finest bubbly.

Congratulations to Studio Gobo and thank you to everyone who participated. If you missed it, don't worry. We've put a few of the questions below for you to have a go at. Hopefully we'll see you at the next quiz and put you to the test. ■



1. NAME THE GAME



2. NAME THE GAME

3. Which industry figurehead left the industry in February this year to take up a position at his beloved Liverpool Football Club?

4. What does the acronym BASIC mean?

5. Guess the quote: "The sun is a wondrous body. Like a magnificent father. If only I could be so grossly incandescent."

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A DECADE OF VOOFOO

Jem Alexander speaks with marketing and PR manager, Sean Walsh on VooFoo Studio's tenth birthday

PLEASE GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF VOOFOO'S HISTORY?

Birmingham based VooFoo Studios was founded ten years ago, in 2007, by Mark Williams (ex Rage and Juiced Games) with a clear ambition to create fun, best in class games that anyone can play. Whilst we remain relatively small at eleven people, we have grown both in size and stature to a firmly established indie studio.

We've worked hard to develop and grow our reputation for developing visually stunning games all of which have proudly been developed using our own in-house tech and game engine. Our first game, *Hustle Kings*, published by Sony in 2009, reached the top of the PSN charts and earned us two Develop Awards nominations. Our stature rose significantly with the development of the 'Pure' series of games. 2016 saw VooFoo move into publishing with the release of our first owned IP, the highly acclaimed top-down racer, *Mantis Burn Racing*, on PS4, Xbox One and Steam. As we celebrate ten years in the industry, VooFoo is now entering into an extremely exciting and busy chapter in our history.

WHAT IS VOOFOO WORKING ON AT THE MOMENT?

We're currently in our busiest period as a studio with a number of as yet unannounced projects in development. For a tight team our project schedule is pretty diverse and often ambitious and we prefer it that way.

The feedback we've received from the community for *Mantis Burn Racing* has been incredible and we're continuing to support that both in terms of new content, features and updates. We're also working to bring the game to a wider audience and onto new platforms. While we can't talk too much about the specifics of some of our other working projects, they do include the development of a new IP which is about as far removed from our other games as you can get.

From a technical point of view we're making regular improvements to our in-house game engine including re-writing the graphics engine to take advantage of new state of the art graphics architectures.

The team at VooFoo Studios celebrating its 10th birthday with some delicious cake

> **It's fantastic to be part of such a diverse and incredibly creative indie sector**
> *Sean Walsh, VooFoo Studios*

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF VOOFOO LOOK LIKE?

We firmly believe our biggest achievements are still ahead of us. Publishing *Mantis Burn Racing* last year was incredibly exciting. This is an area we're going to be developing more, working on more of our own IP, as well as with third party developers. We're focused on making bigger, better games, further developing our in-house tech tools, growing the publishing side of the business and potentially licensing out our proprietary technology and tools.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE UK GAMES INDUSTRY AND ITS PLACE IN THE GLOBAL GAMES COMMUNITY?

The UK has always been at the forefront of the global games industry, which is something we can all be proud of. We're seeing the market for games globally growing bigger and bigger, which means there are more and more opportunities for UK games companies to take advantage of across emerging sectors like mobile, VR and esports. This strong position is no more evident than the indie sector with games often raising the quality bar so high that their production values can easily be compared to triple-A titles. It's fantastic to be part of such a diverse and incredibly creative indie sector where passion and innovation often see small team's punch above their weight, releasing incredibly high quality, commercially successful games.

HOW AND WHY ARE YOU GOING ABOUT EXPANDING INTO PUBLISHING?

While it's quite evident that publishing brings many risks and challenges, it also brings many of the rewards and opportunities that we as a studio want to be able to benefit from. We've worked hard over the past ten years to grow the capability of the studio to the point where we are confident in our ability to not only manage but also maximise the entire publishing process on behalf of others.

We've learned a lot about the digital distribution process and found that we were already capable of doing a lot of the publishing tasks ourselves. Crucially, as we are primarily a development team, we understand first hand the risks and pitfalls that studios face when publishing their games, particularly smaller indie teams. We've taken the journey they're taking plus we've worked with other publishers, so we understand what it takes to take a game to market profitably. There are so many small indie teams out there making great games that can benefit from what we've learned, from our relationships with platform holders and our marketing experience, without which many games would not fulfil their potential. We know we have a lot to offer, so if you're working on a great game and want a publisher who can really make a difference to the success of your game, get in touch. ■

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Working on blockbusters games like Destiny and Halo may be a dream of many, but for co-founder of Polyarc, Chris Alderson, the freedom to create his own visions is more important. **Jem Alexander** talks to him about the creation of Moss, a VR title about developing a bond between the player and the protagonist

A third-person action adventure game with a strong narrative is not something you'd necessarily expect to be the next VR darling, but new studio Polyarc's first game, *Moss*, is exactly that. Announced at Sony's E3 press conference, the game has decades of development experience being funneled into it and looks to explore new areas of VR game design.

Chris Alderson, co-founder of Polyarc, spoke about the formation of the company and why he left his job at Bungie to create *Moss*. After all, jumping from a huge title like *Destiny* to a relatively niche PS4 exclusive VR game is a risky plan. Too risky for some, but not for Alderson.

"I worked on *Destiny* and a few of the *Halo* games," says Alderson. "It's been terrifying. Leaving a place like Bungie, which is such an amazing studio – it was very scary. But when you're in the middle of starting a thing from nothing, you get an intimacy that I hadn't felt as a developer before. There were just four of us in a room talking about ideas and the way we fed off each other felt really good."

Alderson worked at Bungie together with Polyarc co-founders Tam Armstrong and Danny Bulla for several years before deciding to try their own thing. "We'd talked about possibly doing something like Polyarc for five or six years," says Alderson. But it was new technologies and the way that opened up new gameplay mechanics and limitations that was the real catalyst.

"When VR came around we felt like it was the right time to do it. It's definitely been a crazy ride but it's been really rewarding," Alderson adds. "We have a team of very talented people and we decided that our first team of 15 should be industry veterans. In doing so we wanted to hopefully create the future leadership of the company, so we averaged out at a little over ten years experience. We have people that came from Bioware, Epic, ArenaNet, Bungie and Rockstar.

"It's been an amazing experience to work with people that are not only very experienced in their field but also excited as the next person to work together and create something new and unique. Our pedigree gives us a triple-A quality bar, but were still a small team still so the scope will still be pretty compact. I think we're all craftsmen and we want the game to feel as solid as possible."

WHY VR?

Most developers are still tentative about VR. A low install base, split across three different platforms, means it will be a while before mass market VR games become financially viable. But that isn't stopping Polyarc from creating a niche, boutique game out of a passion for the medium.

"We were really excited about VR from the very beginning," says Alderson. "We felt like our approach to designing a VR game first rather than bring an existing one over to VR was a better fit for us. It's risky, but we feel like without risk there won't be any reward.

> **Since VR was a new medium we thought the answer had got to be something new**
> *Chris Alderson, Polyarc*

"We're very excited about the technology and that excitement overshadows the risk factor. If VR goes away or doesn't reach its full potential we'll all leave very proud of what we made, because I think we're making something that's hopefully unique and exciting and fun to play."

CORE BLIMEY

Moss is a game built around Polyarc's newly established core values. When developing for a relatively new technology, with no real industry-wide best-practice in place, these become an important blueprint for your game. Especially for a genre not usually played in VR.

"We took a few months to just explore and see where it brought us and what kind of ideas were created," says Alderson. "We created some core values, we knew we wanted a comfortable experience. We wanted it be that everyone that put on the headset would have a great time, no matter how susceptible they are to motion sickness.

"That fed back into the environment and the world. We want to make sure that if [protagonist] Quill's story is in a happy spot that the environment feels warm, inviting and comfortable. Maybe when she goes to darker scarier areas we can pull on those emotional queues. So, when she's in a darker colder part of the story and she's acting emotional or scared, hopefully it will make you feel uneasy. And again when she's happy or giving you positive feedback hopefully it will make you smile and feel good.

"Another core value of our game is taking you to cool places. You may have noticed that the places feed into comfort and all of these thread into our third, which is physical interaction. Not only interacting with the environment and world but also interacting with Quill in interesting ways. That physical interaction also turns into an emotional interaction, as you're able to heal her and hold her."

Moss stars an adventurous mouse named Quill, who the player not only controls, but also cares for by guiding her through the environment and healing and protecting her against the hazards of the world. Quill can see the player, who takes up physical space in the world, and will develop a relationship with them as the game progresses.

The development of this bond is an important part of the game's narrative.

"Over time, Quill being scared and worried fades away, and you form this bond and this relationship and friendship," says Alderson. "This is gonna be a really interesting story arc not just for Quill, but for the player experiencing it as well. I equate this to you seeing a stray animal and feeding it, but they're not gonna let you give food straight to them. You have to put the food down and leave and once you come back you see the food is gone. Over time you and this stray become friends and you want to care for it and you don't mind it living in your home. I think that's a good comparison and I really enjoy those kinds of stories."

In their quest for this level of experience, the developers at Polyarc explored a few different healing mechanics before landing on one which requires the player to reach out and touch Quill to salve her wounds.

"The healing came about from one of our early on prototypes," Alderson says. "We wanted a special way to heal Quill, and we had a couple of ideas. One was that you found health out in the world, but we felt that broke you out of the experience. We wanted to make it so that everything Quill does feels natural. We thought she could eat food or put it in her backpack, but those animations took a while and you couldn't really do that while in combat.

"Then we tried a self-healing method, so that over time you gained it back, but it just didn't feel right and something about it seemed off. Since VR was a new medium we thought the answer had got to be something new for a new system.

"Finally the healing came out of you reaching in and holding Quill. It's great because it fed back into the whole bond with Quill and the player wanting to protect and take care of her, but also you could do it in the middle of combat and it just felt right."

This is Polyarc's first game, but with the years of experience and the care for both accessibility and storytelling it's bringing to its first VR title, *Moss* is shaping up to be something special. Stepping away from career security and branching out on their own may be risky, but it allows Alderson and his co-founders greater freedom and autonomy. And from that, a strong sense of pride in their game.

"Even with the pedigree of some of the games that we've made," he says. "I know this is the project I am the most proud of." ■

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EDUCATING GAMEMAKERS

GameMaker Studio 2 is finally coming to Mac. **Jem Alexander** speaks to Russell Kay and James Cox of YoYo Games to find out more about the plans for the popular 2D engine and its educational legcay

GameMaker Studio 2 from YoYo Games came out for general release earlier this year, following a two and a half year complete rewrite and modernisation of the GameMaker IDE. One of the big features with the new version is the accessibility of the engine, including a Mac version of the 2D engine, which at time of writing is in beta before release with version 2.1.

But it isn't just Mac users that YoYo Games are aiming for with GameMaker Studio 2. Education is another area where accessibility is key to not only the future of the engine but the future of developers. "We know our audience is quite diverse," says Russell Kay, CTO at YoYo Games. "Everybody from eight year old kids doing school work right through to secondary school then on to university.

"Then indie devs, those who do game jams – a lot of people use it exclusively just for that. Then we have a lot of teachers using it, who we were surprised weren't just using it to teach computer science, but someone like a geography teacher who wanted to use it to illustrate something and make it more dynamic."

"GameMaker has been in education since it's beginning, it was born out of education," says Cox. "Recently we've started some pilot programs. This we find is a good way to test the water, make sure we do something that's actually needed and relevant. We're partnering with education company to be able to provide courses and industry certifications.

"There's some good basics if teachers want to build their own particular types of courses for whatever they're syllabus happens to be, there's a few raw materials that they can already use. Then we have some other education establishments, some non-profit organisations that we've been starting pilot programs with to support people with short-term trial licences, without console support, and for game jams where we give a full access 48 hour license."

STARTING OUT

GameMaker Studio is known as a good starter engine, arguably because of its ties to education. But that isn't the full picture. "There's not a heavy strategy from our point for education and we're not trying to exclude anyone else either," says Cox.

"But from what we've seen with things like Scratch, a next good step is GameMaker, certainly. We've seen it from research, different schools teach different things. My son's school uses PHP. Others use GameMaker if they've been using it for a hobby, or have just found out about it. Making the tool generally accessible, that is a strategy. Therefore it really works for education so you can start at quite a young age."

"GameMaker has always been a 'my first game engine'," says Kay. "That was where it was initially positioned. What we've tried to do as YoYo Games is lift the limits that were in place. GameMaker was always fast to get into but you started to hit limits – 'you can't do this', and 'no, you can't do that'. We're trying to eliminate that completely from the GameMaker vocabulary with 'you can do this, you do it this way.' You can take your project from concept to launch and stay in GameMaker. We don't want people to feel they've hit those limits.

> **You can take your project from concept to launch. We don't want people to feel they've hit limits**
> *Russell Kay, YoYo Games*

"The main thing about GameMaker is that you can iterate on your projects very quickly. So just being able to try something means you can get things easily on to a tablet. You can prototype something and try it out on the actual device without having to go through lots of setup."

FUTUREPROOF

2D game design is very much GameMaker's realm and it makes no apologies for being an engine that caters to that market. But that's not to say that there isn't more that the engine can do. "I think there's advanced uses of 2D, that's where we get in to vectors and skeletons and Spine animation, and we support those particular workflows," says Kay.

"That's where we see 2D developing. There's also that idea of using 3D assets within a 2D environment. We're not adverse to 3D. But supporting workflows to create a 2D game with various different types of assets is something we'll be looking to do in the future.

"We find we have different groups of users. Some of them create mobile games, some of them are a longer form magnum opus, and that's fine. We also have another group of users that want to go onto Steam and then to console. That's perfectly acceptable. We've got another group of users who just want to do HTML 5. So they need to have a route and a vector as to how they could do that." ■

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Agostino Simonetta,
ID@Xbox regional lead, **Xbox**

Alex Moyet,
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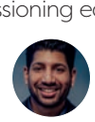

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Danial Wali,
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Ian Goodall,
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Lucas Liaskos,
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Marco Cuesta,
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Michael Natusch,
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Mitu Khandaker-Kokor,
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THE VOTES ARE IN...

This year Brighton once again hosted the industry's biggest game development awards show. Here are your Develop Awards winners along with just some of their feelings and advice from the night

Brenda and John Romero
Winners of the Develop Legends Awards

John Romero: Winning Develop Legends is super awesome! We haven't won an award like this, so it's really great.

Brenda Romero: It's interesting because just after you get it, it hasn't really sunk in yet. Even when you're standing there on the stage it still hasn't sunk in yet. It's incredible, right? I mean, "legends"... It's a huge, huge honor because it's coming from your peers

John Romero: How do you become a legend? Make a bunch of really great games that people like.

Brenda Romero: Make a game that nobody else has made before. If you have an idea that you really feel profoundly passionate about, like you feel you have to make those games... I actually feel anxiety when I'm not working on those games.

If I get a new game idea, I just got to get it done, as if someone else is going to make a 50000 piece game, right?

Keep making games, start making them now, and keep making them. Don't change careers, and don't die.

John Romero: That's very important to becoming legends.

Brenda Romero: Don't die.

UNIVERSALLY SPEAKING
Winner of Best QA and Localisation

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Guerrilla Games
Winner of Studio of the Year (sponsored by Epic Games) and Best Animation (sponsored by Unity)

Herman Hulst: The UK community here in Brighton is a who's who of the UK industry - it's a lot of fun! Tonight has been very nice, I've run into a lot of people that I've known for a long time so it's a little bit of a reunion in the games industry.

Advice for animators? Put in the hours. It's really experience, do it as much as you can, take online courses and build up on your portfolio.

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Rocksteady Games
Winner of Best Visual Design and Best Sound Design

Andy Riley: Winning is pretty special. It's great for what was ultimately a passion project for us in VR, a totally new horizon for us. It's really awesome to win. It's great to win regardless of whether it's VR or anything else. It's great to be recognised for what we've managed to achieve.

Zaffar Cobain: I'm super excited to win! Obviously we've been doing Batman for a while now and we've worked on a new platform in VR. It was a passion project for us - it was really cool to get our hands on the tech, and show what it's like to be the Batman. It's wonderful to be part of the games industry. It's a wonderful experience, and it's great to be here in Brighton.

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Winner of Best In-House Studio and Best Music Design

Richard Beddow: Winning feels great, we really didn't expect it. It was a nice surprise and it's a first for Total War. It's great to have peers voting for your works and the awards are a great opportunity for lots of developers to get together and talk.

Mike Simpson: I think these events are really important. It lets us know that there are many people out there like us and our struggles are some of their struggles, and we can celebrate each other's work. It's great.

Richard Beddow: You've got to be passionate about what you want to do. I think a lot of us got into games because we're passionate about gaming. We're passionate about the craft that we're working in, whether that's art, animation, audio, music and dialogue. Getting involved in modding communities, demo scenes, anything where you can get exposure basically, to honing that craft, working with other disciplines, and starting to get involved with the development community helps.

GHOST TOWN GAMES

Sponsored by: ptw

Winner of Best New IP

Oli De-Vine: It's hugely humbling. This is amazing. To get this recognition from our peers, and to get this recognition in the UK, it's a huge deal to us. The games industry needs awards ceremonies like these, because we need that level of prestige around games. The games that we were next to today, they're absolutely amazing games. It's fantastic to be making them.

EPIC GAMES (Unreal Engine 4)

Winner of Best Engine

"A massive thank you to our customers, our community and the judges that voted for us. It's been a great couple of years since we launched subscription, and then free. It's taught us a lot, so thank you."

Mike Gamble, European Territory Manager

LARRY FESSENDEN (VIA SUPERMASSIVE GAMES)

Sponsored by: ukie

Winner of Best Performance

Will Byles: It's a lovely night, a fantastic night. It's great to see everyone out and it's great to see all the acknowledgement for the work that's going on in the industry.

Pete Samuels: Absolutely, it's been a great evening and were just really made up to be here and any accolade for anything that we do means a lot to us. I actually don't think that Larry has any idea that he was even nominated, we will send this to him, because the man, honestly, we can't tell you how great the guy is, how much he's helped us.

CURVE DIGITAL

Winner of Publishing Hero

Stuart Dinsey: We won and I'm unbelievably happy with this. It's massively unexpected. I was sitting with Epic and just as I said "yeah, maybe next year," our name came up. Genuinely my heart is thumping. I'm so proud of the team, our developers, our staff, the people that made this happen. Thank you to everybody who voted for Curve. Thank you so much. This is where the dreams are made.

Sponsored by: PERFORCE

FIDDLESTICKS GAMES
Winner of Best Micro/Start-Up Studio

Henry Hoffman: The awards have been amazing. I flew down from Sweden for Develop and the awards were always going to be the highlight of the event. We were up for four awards. We were super fortunate just to get nominated for one, but then four? We actually walked away with one, and we were so not expecting to win. It's absolutely incredible, our minds have been blown.
Daniel Da Rocha: The industry prestige is a big deal especially for new studios like ours, so I think nights like this are really important.
Henry Hoffman: You come to an event like this and it's full of CEOs of big companies, who have established big studios and stuff, and then there are small indies like us, which is just a two man studio. We come in, and we can see the potential of what these studios can achieve. It's a massive boon to us, and it's massively inspiring as to what we can do.

Sponsored by: GAMES LONDON

PLAYTONIC GAMES
Winner of Best New Studio

Kevin Bayliss: It's fantastic to win. Making videogames is what we do. It's just the same as playing them, you spend years and years playing them, looking at a monitor for too long, belching, farting, eating the wrong things – and then you get to the final level and it's all over. But we still love it so it's fantastic we got there and we made a game.
Hamish Lockwood: I think that it's the icing on the cake. You know it makes it absolutely worthwhile. I mean it's been a short but amazing journey with Playtonic. We built a studio and created a game at the same time, which is no easy feat. And then to get this kind of recognition on our first product with such a small team with big ambitions – it's a massive massive honor.

Sponsored by: amiqus
European Specialist Games Recruitment

PLAYGROUND GAMES
Winner of Best Independent Studio

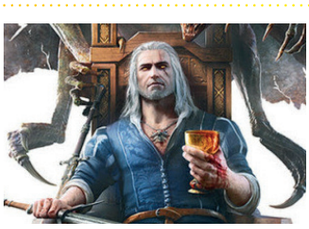
Gav Raeburn: Winning feels amazing. Amazing. It just means so much. It's great, and I know it means a lot to the guys as well. Events like tonight are a nice celebration with all the developers. You've seen the buzz out there, everyone's really happy to be here, so we're here whether we're nominated or not. If you believe in what you're doing, just keep going, and keep going, you'll achieve. It's exactly what we did.

REALTIME UK
Winner of
Best Creative Outsourcer: Visual & Development

Dave Cullinane: Winning is absolutely amazing. It's a brilliant achievement for the team. We've been doing pre-rendered for so long and we've always asked when are we going to do realtime stuff and here's the evidence.

CD PROJEKT RED
Winner of Best Writing

After cleaning up at 2016's Develop Awards win another for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt - Blood & Wine*



YoYo Games (GameMaker Studio)
Winner of Best Design & Creativity Tool

Russell Kay: It feels surprising to win. We were not expecting this - it's great, fantastic! It's great for the team back in Dundee.
James Cox: It's great for all the people who use GameMaker, as well. It's a tool for everyone and it's lovely to win an award that qualifies that.

CONGRATULATIONS

to all the winners and nominees of the 2017 Develop Awards

from the Ukie team

Ukie are a proud sponsor of the Develop Awards, which recognise the best creative, technical, educational and business talent across our sector.

We're especially happy to have supported the Best Performance Award this year. Congratulations to winner Larry Fessenden.

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PERSISTENT STUDIOS (POPCORN FX)

Sponsored by: Testronic

Winner of Best Tools Provider - Production

Denis Bourdain: This win is unexpected. It feels really warming, especially for the people back at home. They are working every day and this project started almost twelve years ago.

It's kind of funny because we are in the dark. We work for people who work for the player. But we like to meet them. It's important for us to meet them and so we never miss an opportunity. We were blessed to be nominated twice so it was great for us.

AUDIOMOTION STUDIOS

Winner of Best Services

Brian Mitchell: It feels pretty good to win. We have won it a couple of times in the past, and it's always a great surprise. You never see it coming. It's great to have the support from the rest of the community.

Events like this are really important for us, because we're in services and so we rely on the developers. Meeting up, seeing how they're doing, what's coming up, whats going on, you know, really trying to service them for what they need, and make a good job of what we do. The Awards has been a great night. It's a lot of fun, it's time to catch up.

ABERTAY UNIVERSITY

Outstanding Contribution to Education

Gregor White: It's great to get a bit of recognition and it's great to come and celebrate with the industry, who have been a huge part of what we've done. Events like this is where we get to reinvigorate those relationships.

AARDVARK SWIFT

Winner of Best Recruiter

Ian Goodall: It feels amazing, really shocked. I think we won the first ever Develop Award, and we've been nominated every year since and not won, so I'm very happy. Events like this are very important. It's great when everyone is in one place.

Soundcuts Ltd

Winner of Best Outsourcer: Audio

Adele Cutting: I feel awesome. We really did not expect to win it and I'm so chuffed. I'm chuffed for the entire team.

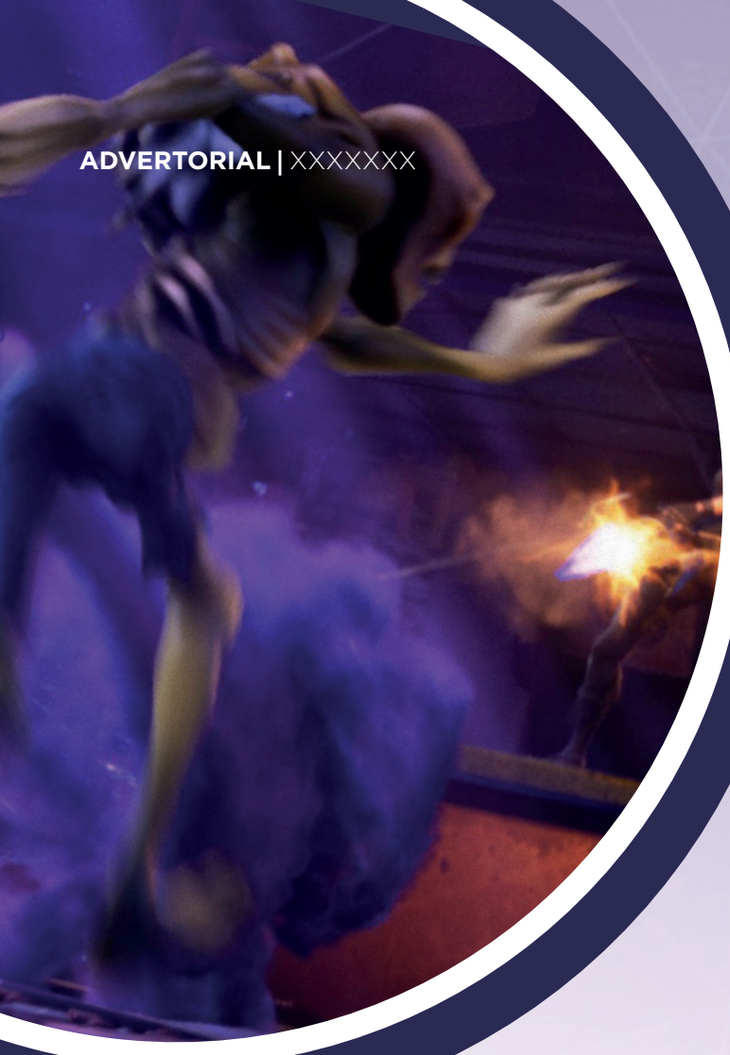
I love coming down for the Develop Awards, because it's where all the networking goes on. It's where you find all the people that have been working in it for years.

MULTIPLAY

Winner of Best Technology Provider

Craig Fletcher: We couldn't believe we won. It's going to mean a huge amount to the team back home, now we can actually say we are an 'Award-winning technology provider'.

Paul Manuel: The gaming industry's like an extended family. Everyone tends to know everyone else, and it's really good to meet up at these things. It's an ideal space to network with existing and new clients.



FORTNITE

SUPERCHARGING CG ANIMATION PIPELINES WITH GAME ENGINE TECHNOLOGY

In 2017, Epic Games created a three minute cinematic trailer for the video game *Fortnite*. This production consisted of six sequences containing over one hundred and thirty individual shots.

By utilising Unreal Engine to work within a realtime environment, the creative staff could iterate faster and quickly propagate changes to the production team. Artists, now being more mindful of frame rate and engine performance, were naturally inclined to creatively experiment and find simpler and more elegant solutions.

PRE-PRODUCTION WITH UNREAL ENGINE

During the early storyboarding process, even before there was an editor in place, Sequencer was utilised to construct preliminary assembly edits of the trailer. Having a library of assets prepared early in the pre-production process is important to realising the benefits of real-time production. Access to pre-constructed assets makes previsualisation closer to that of live action film production where the production designer build sets, the director blocks out action, and the cinematographer shoots the scene.

For the *Fortnite* trailer, the production team was able to ramp up quickly by drawing on the existing asset library from the *Fortnite* video game. Many of these models required increasing their polygonal resolution for the final trailer, but nearly all of the game assets were available for immediate use in previsualisation.

Along with motion capture performances, these assets were used to build sets and previsualise potential footage. Using Sequencer, the director and rough layout artists could create shots and directly assemble an edit of the whole sequence in Unreal before passing that footage to a dedicated editor. This saved a lot of back and forth time between the rough layout artists and editorial while improving shot continuity and screen direction. Any additional requests for coverage could be provided at the editor's or director's request.

Upon completion in editorial, the cut was re-conformed in Sequencer where the shots were properly broken down, reindexed, prepped for production and then added to Shotgun for production management and shot tracking.

SCENE FLEXIBILITY WITH SEQUENCER

Care was taken during the scene setup process in Unreal to organise the project to reflect a traditional show hierarchy consisting of sequences and shots. To accomplish this, a master "persistent" level acts as an overall virtual container of sublevels and level sequences. Sublevels are used to organise scenes and control, via Sequencer, what is visible at different times throughout the trailer.

Each sequence has multiple organisational sublevels associated with it. This allows supervisors to divide tasks into disciplinary branches like layout, animation, and lighting/fx while allowing artists to work in parallel. By using priority overrides within Sequencer, artists can alter the scene by taking advantage of inheritance from the show level to the sequence level, and from the sequence level to the shot.

Objects and attributes are set at the top show/sequence level, and then overridden or modified on a shot by shot basis. This allows for the easy setup of lighting and set dressing

requirements at the sequence level where it can be shared, or inherited, by all shots in the sequence.

Each individual shot can then choose to override any light or object's attributes. This approach of organising workflow is consistent with the methodology many animation and vfx companies utilise.

FACIAL PIPELINE WITH ALEMBIC CACHING

In an effort to bring animated feature level performances to the *Fortnite* characters, Epic developed a hybridised FBX and Alembic work flow that overcomes the limited number of eight skin influences per vertex found in Unreal's implementation of FBX. Using this approach, artists are no longer limited by skin influences and are able to utilise all of Maya's deformations and rigging techniques.

Characters are animated in Maya and brought into Unreal as two animations; one for the head and one for the body. The head animation is imported as an alembic cache, allowing for a one-to-one match to the to the originally constructed Maya deformations. During the import into Unreal, alembic files are converted into PCA compressed GPU morphs, stored in memory and then blended per frame in real time.

Alembic caching was also used to import rigid body destruction simulations. All character body animations are imported as FBX and Unreal's Anim Dynamics capabilities supplied secondary animation details. Facial geometry and rigging statistics include:

- Facial Rig: 200 Joints, Blend shapes, Lattices
- Head Geometry: 150,000 vertices average

DYNAMIC LIGHTING AND COLOR CORRECTION

For both the game and the trailer, *Fortnite* chose to forego baked lighting in favor of the increased flexibility of dynamic lights with cast shadows. This allows shot-by-shot adjustments of lighting values and set dressing placement. To achieve a high quality cinematic feeling, and still run in realtime, the team leveraged existing features like distance field AO to provide soft shadowing on indirect lights, or non-shadow casting lights. For lights that required true soft cast shadows, artists used the newly added Percent Centered Soft Shadow (PCSS) feature on spotlights and directional lights. Final color correction was done via the new filmic tonemapper. Combined with Sequencer, the tonemapper allowed for final shot- by-shot color correction.

REAL-TIME EFFECTS AND POST PROCESSING ENHANCEMENTS

Traditional animation pipelines rely on complicated render farms to calculate visual effects and post processing enhancements as separate render passes that must be composited in a dedicated compositing program like After Effects or Nuke. While the use of these kinds of programs have their place, Unreal eliminates a number of these steps by providing those capabilities in engine. Some of the more notable realtime effects used for this trailer include:

- FFT Bloom
- 3D voxel volumetric fog
- Ray marching shaders for rendering clouds and fluid sims
- Render targets to calculate customized volumes
- Connected distant field AO to base materials, enabling indirect light sources (bounce and ll) to not use cast shadows and instead use soft AO shadows.
- Direct illumination (key and any lights that must cast shadows) using real time soft shadows with PCSS

REAL TIME FLUID SIMS AND RAY MARCHING SHADERS

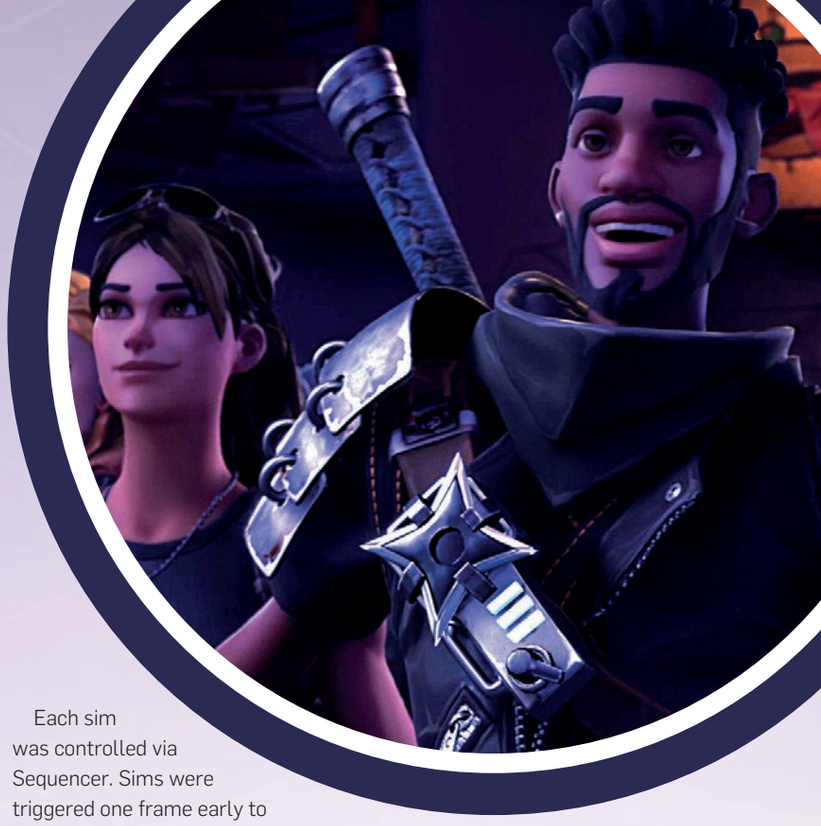
The trailer required over twenty five unique husk death effects. Due to Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) restrictions, the FX had to be very non-violent.

Each death needed to be lit correctly within the scene and respond to scene forces. By simulating the effect in realtime the results were more changeable.

Volume textures were stored as 'pseudo volumes' and laid out as slices in a standard 2D texture.

Characters were voxelized using a simple trick known by the production as shadowmap voxelization, which used four views due to time constraints. This allowed converting character skeletal meshes into 'smoke monsters' that could seed the density of the volume textures.

Mesh motion vectors were also captured during voxelization and added to the simulation during advection stages. Artists used velocity with a combination of curl noise and normals from the skeletal meshes.



Each sim was controlled via Sequencer. Sims were triggered one frame early to allow capture of motion vectors. Afterwards, the mesh contribution (density and velocity) could be key framed. This allowed for very rapid iterations vs traditional offline rendered simulations.

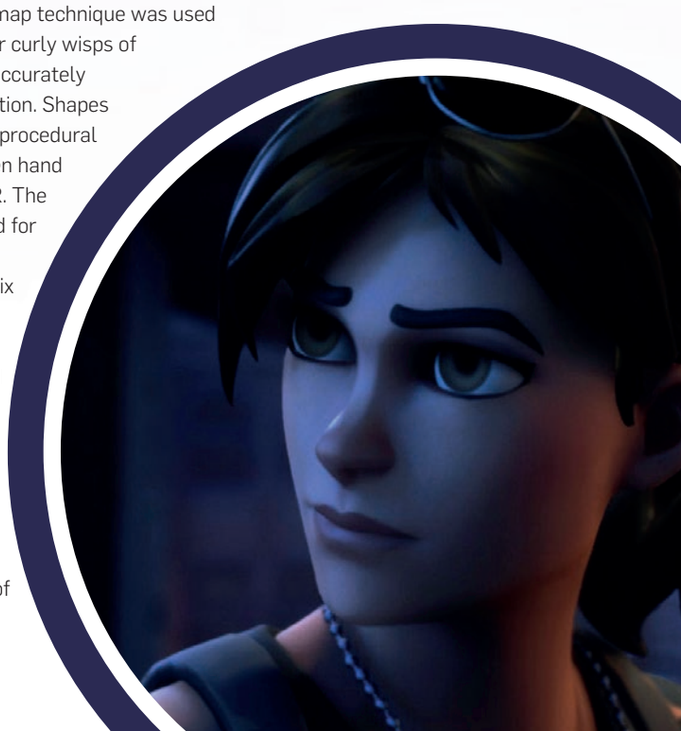
Pressure iterations were run at half resolution as an optimisation. Blueprints were also created that could convert any sim into a flipbook from the specified camera. Flipbooks were used as a fallback plan for any shots that could not afford simulation (for example if too many sims were needed on screen). The 3D simulations were rendered using a standard ray march shader. Extinction color was exposed to give more stylised color controls.

All volumetric storm clouds were rendered using a similar ray march shader, but utilized 3D flowmaps instead of full fluid simulations. An iterative flowmap technique was used to track longer curly wisps of clouds more accurately without distortion. Shapes were a mix of procedural layers and then hand sculpted in VR. The velocities used for the flowmaps were also a mix between curl noise and hand sculpted velocities in VR. Procedural shapes were used more for shots showing lots of growth, as artists controlled the growth of the procedural shapes parametrically over the life of a shot.

CONCLUSIONS

In traditional 3D animation workflows, the final piece of the puzzle is achieving beautifully rendered results. While this has been demonstrated as obtainable, it's usually accomplished through a considerable investment in computer hardware and by following a rigid, linear and non-realtime studio process.

This is becoming more and more challenging with the increasing demands on studios to produce high quality content at a reasonable price and within a reduced timeframe. New workflows based on realtime technologies are becoming the next evolutionary step to addressing these concerns. ■



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BRAINS EDEN

Develop was honoured to be a judge at this year's Brains Eden gamea festival. **Sean Cleaver** talks us through the finale of the festival and what it was like to judge such a closely contested competition

Photo Credit: Matthew Power Photography

It always feels slightly strange coming to a game jam at the very end. Everywhere around you are participants, in this case university students, mentors and event staff. Everyone is tired but also beaming with positivity on having completed the previous 48 hours of game development.

The jam in question was the Brains Eden game festival. Over the weekend of June 30th to July 3rd at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, 34 teams were given a brief and competed to win prizes.

The brief this year was 'Give and Take', a brief that the organisers thought long and hard about in order to encourage fewer co-op games being developed. Thankfully, given the quality of the games developed, this had the exact opposite effect.

One of the most common features of many of the games created for the event wasn't just local multiplayer but, specifically, shared controllers. Following the style of BAFTA and now Develop Award winning *Overcooked* from Cambridge locals Ghost Town Games, the use of one controller for two players was very prevelant.

During the weekend, the teams from various universities from around the UK, Europe and for the first time, China, all conceived and developed a project using the 'Give and Take' theme. Teams also attended talks put on by mentors and sponsors to help their projects and to give advice on getting a graduate job in the industry.

A fair was set up for the entrants to talk, network and meet sponsors and supporters including Aardvark Swift, Frontier Developments, Sumo Digital, Codemasters, Unity and PlayStation First. But for the judges it was time to cast an eye over the weekend's work.

> **Looking out across the room and seeing those faces. That's so important**
> *Dr. Andy Salmon, Anglia Ruskin University*

The quality of the projects created in such a short period of time was absolutely staggering. The gameplay, mechanics, art, use of engine and even concept was above and beyond anything I could have expected really showcasing the talent that we have in this country at a student level. It was fascinating to see how the brief of 'Give and Take' was so wildly interpreted. Students had the choice of which engine to use, including Unreal Engine and Unity. Some projects even had time to make voxel-based art in games. The creativity and skills shown wowed all of the judges.

Dr Andy Salmon, deputy dean of the faculty of arts, law and social sciences at host venue Anglia Ruskin University, gave the prizes at the end of the event. "The passion shines through," he told me after the ceremony. "Both in the students and mentors. I came over the weekend and the thing that was really tangible was they way in which the students were very on task and getting an awful lot of support from the mentors. You can't really construct that in a normal educational situation.

The support from the mentors and the industry was evident across the event. Dr. Salmon is very aware of the impact events like this can have for the games industry as a whole.

"I think it's vital. As our keynote speaker, Karl Hilton from Sumo Digital said, young people are coming in with further ideas and further creativity, adjusted skill sets and its very valuable for the industry.

"I think the other thing is the demographic. 90 per cent of young people on the planet play games. So the more contact the studios can have with that demographic, the better and more effective that's going to be."

While playing the games is obviously a highlight and at the end of the event everyone gets the chance to play each others games that they'd heard so much about, I personally enjoyed hearing the tales from the weekend. Following the ceremony, it was great to meet students and listen to tales from them and the mentors about the difficulties and challenges they overcame. For Dr. Salmon, his favourite times for the event are the beginning and the end.

"When the theme was announced by mentor Matt Holland, you could feel the excitement in the room. The students filed off and you could tell they would be on it straight away. That's the kind of atmosphere that you want to engender.

"My second favourite part of the festival was the end. Presenting the prizes and looking out across the room and seeing those faces with all the hope and expectation and the generosity for the people that had won. That's so important." ■

Thrust

The winner of the best PC Game Award, Thrust, could be released tomorrow. That's not just hyperbole. The competitive multiplayer game positioned three jets in to a central wall with a conveyor belt around the outside of the playing area providing fuel for the jets, taps to empty fuel from opponents jets and explosives to stop your opponent from activating their side of the wall. To activate it there are two big fire buttons and when pressed the jets move the wall across to the opponents' side in an attempt to squash them and win.

Tug of war goes so well with give and take and the premise was so solidified in the minds of the students from Howest University College in Belgium that the mentors I spoke to were worried they wouldn't pull it off. "We spent a lot of time brainstorming different ideas, trying to figure out what might work," the team told me. "We spent about five or six hours of planning. We made sure that every issue that came out gameplay wise we had a solution for it."

"We started the first day until 10pm planning the mechanic, making sure everyone was on the same page and then the next day we got to work. It went super smoothly. When we started we had a version control issue but that worked itself out."

Judges Choice Award

Develop was honoured to be able to award the Judges Choice award to Les Baguettes from Pole 3D in France. Their game had two controller-like space ships on screen mimicking the Dualshock 4 controllers in the player's hands. Bombs are tossed on to the controller shaped spaceships and each button on the controller can depress like a spring to throw them on to your opponent. You use the analogue sticks to manouver the bombs to a button before you fire them across to your opponent. Occasionally the buttons will change position and a power up allows you to use the touch pad to toss every bomb to your opponent at once.

Best Mobile Game

The team from the Hauzong University of Science and Technology in China has possibly the most literal take on the brief, with a two-player, top-down game for tablet that rewarded reactions and teamwork rather than competing. One side represented a cube logo, while the opposite represented a sphere. When, for example, a sphere appeared, the person on the side of the cube logo has to swipe the sphere towards the second players side for them to take, and visa versa. Occasionally a bomb would appear where both players need to take it in order to defuse it. A wonderfully simple and enjoyable game of reactions.

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green man gaming

DEVELOPING **BEYOND**

Epic Games' Developing Beyond competition has now entered its final phase and the final three games have been chosen. **Jem Alexander** speaks to the finalists to find out how the process has been, and discover what it's like to collaborate with a scientific researcher on their projects

(L-R) Epic Games' Mike Gamble, Wellcome Trust's Iain Dodgeon, Robert MacLaughlin, Eliza di Lorenzo, Oliver Lindsey, Susan Calman, Olie Kay, Matteo Sosso, University of Cambridge's Ian Goodfellow and Eurogamer's Chris Bratt

The three finalists of Epic's Developing Beyond competition have now been revealed. Announced at an event held at Develop:Brighton, the finalists will receive a further $60,000 of funding, allowing them to further develop their games for the next six months before the finals.

Developing Beyond began in January, with applicants being whittled down to just six a month later. These teams were each awarded $15,000 to progress with their concepts and were partnered with a scientific researcher, who would help give a fresh perspective as they created their games based on the theme of "transformations". Now six have become three. The winner will be judged in January by an expanded panel, which includes Develop Legend Award winner John Romero, and will receive a prize of $150,000. Second and third price will receive $50,000 and $30,000 respectively. So whatever happens, these teams know they've got a chunk of cash heading their way.

> **Developing Beyond gave me the chance to make the prototype that I needed to**
> *Robert MacLaughlin, Lost Forest Games*

"It sounds cheesy saying it, but it's such a close competition," says Oliver Lindsey, director at All Seeing Eye, one of the competition finalists. "Everyone's pieces have been incredibly well produced, and far more put together than I think anyone could have imagined."

Robert Maclaughlin, from finalist Lost Forest Games, is in complete agreement. "It's brilliant. I mean, coming here to see the six projects that the teams have produced, it's just incredible to see the quality and breadth of interest in all the projects. It was an honour to be part of the six It's an incredible opportunity to try and think up how games can work with real life. How games can work with medical science, how games can work with scientific research.

"I found it really really useful and interesting to talk to my scientific advisors, because although they weren't games people at all, they had helped in some way because they didn't have that natural filter on what is possible and what isn't possible in a game. They had far more exciting advice for me than I thought possible, and it's just been a really really fruitful relationship."

Other finalists also found that collaborating with a scientific researcher, in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, was an unexpectedly

eye-opening experience. "Working with the researcher has just been fantastic," says Olie Kay, associate creative director at All Seeing Eye. "She genuinely input a huge amount into defining what our game is."

Eliza Di Lorenzo, from finalist Untold Games, had a similar experience. "Working with a scientific advisor added to the game," she says. "It's changed some things in the game in a way that we didn't fully expect initially. So it's been a different approach of what we've done so far in enriching in some way.

"To have someone as prestigious as the Wellcome Trust being involved in this thing, it gives prestige to what we are doing. It opens doors to things that we didn't think about, like as I said. We found that being as scientifically accurate as possible wasn't a problem if we managed to make it fun inside of the game."

NEW PERSPECTIVES

When you introduce someone who doesn't necessarily have a games background into the development process, strange things can happen. The lexicon of games is so entrenched at this point, the best-practices so established, that having fresh eyes on your project can allow you to escape familiar traps and try something new.

"It creates these unique kind of intersections," says All Seeing Eye's Oliver Lindsey.

"You wouldn't necessarily go out with the intention of creating something that's based on science, so I think the ecosystem that it creates is a real microcosm, where being paired with a researcher... We were fantastically lucky with the researcher that Wellcome introduced us to, in that she was much more of a historian and a researcher than a scientist, and as a result of that we got these wonderful stories and these incredible new directions to take our game that we never would have taken had we not been introduced to her."

> **To have the Wellcome Trust involved gives prestige to what we are doing**
> *Eliza Di Lorenzo, Untold Games*

Untold Games' Eliza Di Lorenzo has some choice words of advice for anyone looking to enter the competition in the future. "When you come to work with your scientific advisor, try to get them as involved as possible from the beginning," she says. "It can be a bit difficult sometimes because, of course, they become another dependent, and they are very, very busy. Maybe they don't know anything about games and they have no idea what you are planning to do.

"It's part of a challenge when you are participating in this type thing, making them feel part of your team and making them understand how you are using their knowledge, how it's going to shape the game you are doing. I think it's good for both parties."

UNREAL CREATIVITY

But greater even than a fresh perspective, finalists see Developing Beyond's main benefit as a funding platform that allows them a level of creative freedom they don't or can't normally enjoy.

"Developing Beyond gave me the chance to make the prototype that I needed to," says Lost Forest Games' Robert MacLaughlin. "It's extremely difficult to find the sort of funding that Developing Beyond provides nowadays, to go from concept to prototype, and Developing Beyond has done that for Lost Forest Games, and it's basically secured the future of the company for the next year or so."

"We're a client facing studio, so we build to order," says All Seeing Eye's Lindsey. "So to actually have the opportunity to actually take some time out from that and develop some of our own IP... This game's been kicking around in the studio for three or four years, so the idea now of actually being able to turn it into something is great.

"We've always teetered between wanting to write and develop our own experiences, but then obviously needing to make money. We're still only a small studio, there's three, four people at most, and so at this stage it would really allow us the means to actually filter down the work we're doing and concentrate on just one thing, rather than having to do seven things at once."

Lindsey's colleague Olie Kay is in complete agreement. "The grant money that they give for us to develop the games, it's something that we wouldn't have been in a position to make our own IP at all," he says. "It's what we all really want to be doing, so it's really fantastic to be a part of it, and certainly to get through to where we are now." ■

EPIC MEGAGAMES

Seed by All Seeing Eye

Seed is a virtual reality game where players can discover, grow and engineer generative plant life. The game immerses the player into a visually stunning environment, using hand tracking to allow players to craft unique and beautiful plants which grow quickly before their eyes. As the planet's population expands, the relationship with plants and crops is crucial to human survival. In the face of a changing world Seed aims to explore this relationship by taking inspiration from seed banks and the roles they play.

Terramars by Untold Games

In Terramars the player manages six crew members in a mission to start the terraforming of Mars. In order to do so, they will have to manage the planet's resources, development of the base camp and, most importantly, the repercussions on the mental and physical health of the astronauts from the conditions in which they're living. Alongside exploring the transformation of the planet, Terramars explores the challenges and stresses on human bodies, minds and social relationships when adapting to life in an alien environment.

Winter Hall by Lost Forest Games

Winter Hall, a narrative exploration game about the legacy of the Black Death, enables the player to leap through time and live a few hours in the lives of a connected web of characters. As the player explores the world from their first-person perspective, and items and stories set in that era will be surfaced. The game sees the player transform into different people throughout time, and explores their lives and the changes that occur through the years.

DOLBY

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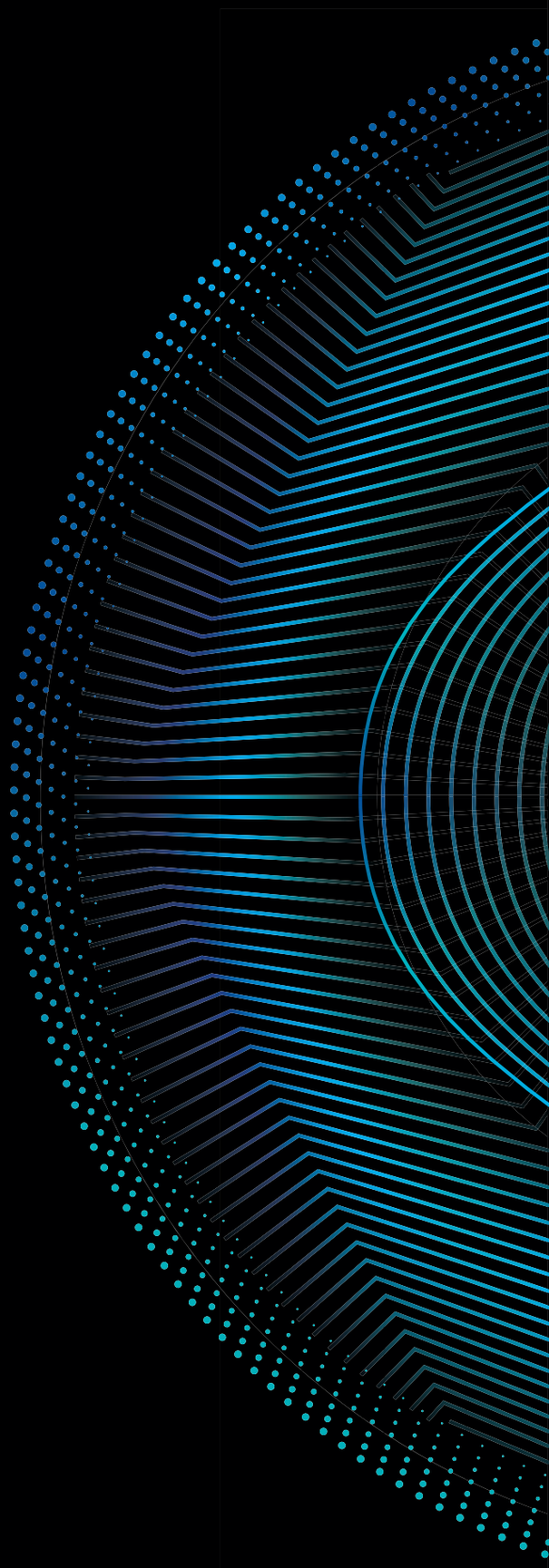
AND
NOMINEES.



DEVELOPER.DOLBY.COM

MICRO MACHINES WORLD SERIES

How do you handle working on a project solo, creating new SFX and also deal with a feisty and loud celebrity? **John Broomhall** finds out from Codemasters' audio expert Jethro Dunn

TELL US ABOUT THE GAME AND ITS AUDIO CHALLENGES

Micro Machines World Series is an evolution of the MM formula. We expanded on the popular Battle Mode with large multiplayer arenas and FPS-style game modes like capture the flag. The action is FPS but the top-down view is more like a MOBA. Audio plays a key role helping the player understand what's happening, especially when things get chaotic.

The audio was basically down to me with some dialogue and music composition support and 30 per cent of an audio programmer's time to address low level stuff. Music was challenging because match lengths could be between two and 20 minutes - bespoke music would have been expensive and probably overkill, therefore the MCPS per-game licence (all the library music you can eat for £5K – all platforms) was a no-brainer. However, I couldn't leave out layered music entirely, so our in-house composer Mark Willott produced a cool reboot of the original MM music in three layers.

The amount of audio detail is very high for a mid-priced title. *World Series* has 35 per cent more sound effects than *Flashpoint: Red River* though produced and implemented by one person in one year. We wrote our own Wwise integration for Unity to provide a few features we wanted. We made some cool game design and UI tools that enabled me to do most of the hook-up which increased implementation and iteration speed.

HOW DID YOU OBTAIN SOURCE SOUND?

The physics audio is all matchbox-scale toy cars recorded rolling, skidding and colliding with the surfaces you see in-game. I borrowed some of my son's toy cars and raided Codies Campus and my home for objects to drive them on. I recorded slow and fast rolls and skids plus collisions on 60 surfaces as well as real collisions and movement.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH BRIAN BLESSED?

Brian was awesome. Celebrities can be difficult but he was a true pro. He came in, did the business, shook the walls down, terrorised the staff and entertained us all. When showing him around, he barged into an important-looking meeting shouting 'don't listen to them!'

HOW WAS IT WORKING SOLO?

The danger is losing objectivity and spending too much time hacking away at a bad idea. Feature-creep can affect you exponentially. I always placeholder things first – get the tech working, prove the concept then spend time on the assets. I try to be clear about what can be delivered in the timescale, so that I don't give myself more work than I can handle. Having people I can ask for opinions or advice around helps, even though they're on different projects. For me, mixing is the biggest thing. It's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture when mixing a project of this size – 37 engines, 60 weapons, 31 tracks, six game modes, five languages and three different listener configurations is a lot for one person to keep track of (whilst simultaneously bug-fixing).

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PLEASED WITH?

I'm pleased with the level of detail. Little things like when you get sucked into the gravity well. Or when you launch a nitrous tank missile at a burning opponent you get a different vfx and sfx (it's the sample I hate the most because it's so over used: Sound Ideas 6015_28. I used it just to troll myself!). I even used personal pet-hate tropes – tinnitus and heart beats. But they work. Sometimes, the most obvious sound is the right sound after all. ■

John Broomhall is a game audio specialist creating and directing music, sound and dialogue
www.johnbroomhall.co.uk

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to all of the
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winners

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Gamescom in Cologne, 22nd – 24th August

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PERFORCE

CONGRATULATIONS

To the Year's Top Game Developers

Perforce, the most widely used version control and collaboration solution in the game development industry, is delighted to announce that 19 of its customers were honored by the Develop Awards.

Congratulations to all the Perforce customer finalists and award winners!

NEW GAMES IP
Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
Snake Pass – *Sumo Digital*
Little Nightmares – *Bandai Namco*

ANIMATION
Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
Total War: Warhammer – *Creative Assembly*
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt –
Blood and Wine – *CD Projekt Red*

VISUAL DESIGN
Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
Forza Horizon 3 – *Playground Games*
Halo Wars 2– *Creative Assembly*
Batman: Arkham VR – *Rocksteady Studios*
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt –
Blood and Wine – *CD Projekt Red*

MUSIC DESIGN
Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
Forza Horizon 3 – *Playground Games*
Sniper Elite 4 – *Rebellion*
Total War: Warhammer – *Creative Assembly*
Get Even – *Bandai Namco*

SOUND DESIGN
PlayStation VR Worlds – *Sony Interactive Entertainment*
Until Dawn: Rush of Blood – *Supermassive Games*
Forza Horizon 3 – *Playground Games*
Halo Wars 2 – *Creative Assembly*
Sniper Elite 4– *Rebellion*
Stories Untold – *No Code*
Batman: Arkham VR – *Rocksteady Studios*

BEST WRITING
Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt –
Blood and Wine – *CD Projekt Red*
Stories Untold – *No Code*
Batman: Arkham VR – *Rocksteady Games*
Get Even – *Bandai Namco*

BEST PERFORMANCE
Doug Cockle – The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt –
Blood and Wine – *CD Projekt Red*
Larry Fessenden – Until Dawn: Rush of Blood –
Supermassive Games
Jon McKellan – Stories Untold – *No Code*
Mark Hamill – Batman: Arkham VR – *Rocksteady Studios*

PUBLISHING HERO
Team17
Sega Europe Ltd

MICRO/START UP STUDIO
No Code
Supermassive Games
Playground Games
CD Projekt Red
Sumo Digital
Rebellion

IN-HOUSE STUDIO
Creative Assembly
Rocksteady Games
Guerrilla Games
Team17
Jagex

CREATIVE OUTSOURCER – VISUAL & DEVELOPMENT
Multiple projects – *d3t*

DESIGN & CREATIVITY TOOL
Guerrilla Games – Decima Engine
Epic Games – Unreal Engine

SERVICES
d3t

CREATIVE OUTSOURCER – AUDIO
Submersion Audio – Robo Recall – *Epic Games*
Nimrod – Horizon Zero Dawn – *Guerrilla Games*
Sounding Sweet – Forza Horizon 3 – *Playground Games*
93 Steps – Ride 2 – *Milestone*

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER
Epic Games

STUDIO OF THE YEAR
Supermassive Games
Guerrilla Games
Playground Games
Sumo Digital
Creative Assembly
CD Projekt Red
Team 17
Rebellion

WORKING THE NARRATIVE

Narrative design is an important part of any creative endeavour. Game projects will often use writers and narrative designers towards the end of a project but the role can do so much more. **Sean Cleaver** finds out what narrative means for game development employment opportunities

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THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY
Infocom interactive fiction - a science fiction story
Copyright (c) 1984 by Infocom, Inc. All rights reserved.
Release 47 / Serial number 840914

You wake up. The room is spinning very gently round your head. Or at least it would be if
you could see it which you can't.

It is pitch black.

>Turn on light.
Good start to the day. Pity it's going to be the worst one of your life. The light is now
on.
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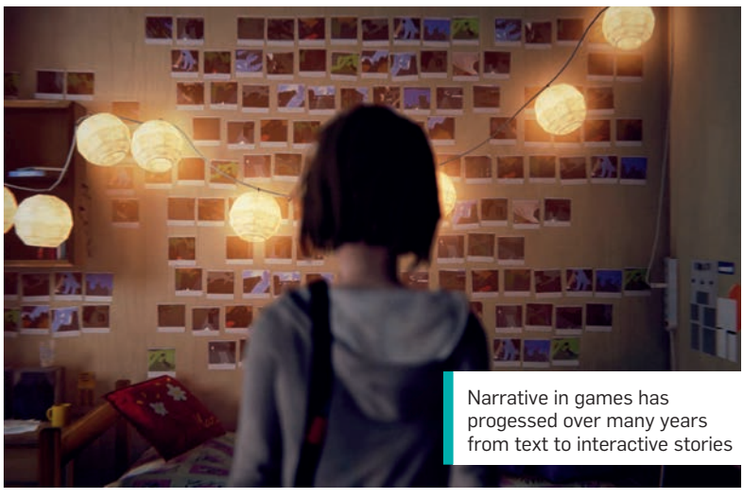


Narrative in games has progessed over many years from text to interactive stories

Writing about writing is the inevitable fate of any writer – That was something I said at a university talk I once gave and here I am realising that fate. Writing in game development has a less precise career path compared to other roles. What are narrative or writing job roles actually called and what does someone in that role do?

"I tend to be a little discursive around the job title narrative designer," said Rob Morgan, a freelance writer and narrative designer. "I start a lot of my talks by saying I'm a game writer and a narrative designer 'whatever that is'. This isn't out of any disrespect for narrative design. The role is a big part of my own job, and usually the most difficult part. But I think it's fair to say that the job title means something different between the different companies that use it. For people looking to do this job it's important to know that it's a vital, but in many ways non-standardised, part of the industry. That's no surprise since game jobs, perhaps especially story, text and objective-based jobs, are as varied as games are themselves."

"The narrative designer is a complex role which interfaces with so many other cross-functional team members (coders, artists, designers, producers) that there can be more than one route in," says Liz Prince, recruitment specialist at Amiqus.

"A typical cornerstone is writing, whether that be journalistic, script, in game or creative story writing. The narrative design role requires an intimate understanding of many elements such as gameplay, engine capability, player journey, etc. This makes it tricky to transfer into the industry if all your writing is outside of games. For the same reason there are few entry level narrative design roles available and it's typically a role people move in to having already started their games career."

"Being a good writer or a good storyteller is not enough to get a job working in narrative design," believes founder of Linx Agency, Benjamin Ryalls. "Games companies are looking for people who not only appreciate the unique requirements of game writing, but who understand the collaborative nature of the process and how production works across a variety of very different and specialised roles."

THE BLANK PAGE

While writing is obviously a requirement for a narrative design role, it is clear that more experience is often needed and that there isn't a traditional way to enter a role in the field.

"I went at it in multiple ways and did a lot of unpaid work early on to bolster my CV," says Rebellion narrative designer, Colin Harvey. "I managed to pitch and get some paid articles commissioned by magazines like Edge

and Retro Gamer, as well as writing an unpaid column about games for an American website. I also got myself a scriptwriting gig on an indie game, again working for free. From there I was able to get freelance story development work with Sony, generating plot ideas according to their remits, which (huzzah!) was paid. All the while I was doing a PhD in video game storytelling, and slowly building up a portfolio of creative writing in other media."

Rob Morgan also started his narrative design career with a role at Sony. "I started working in games as an editor (technically a junior producer) at Sony London Studio at a time when they were beginning to work on games with more words. I had good opportunities and worked my way up to game writer, then went freelance.

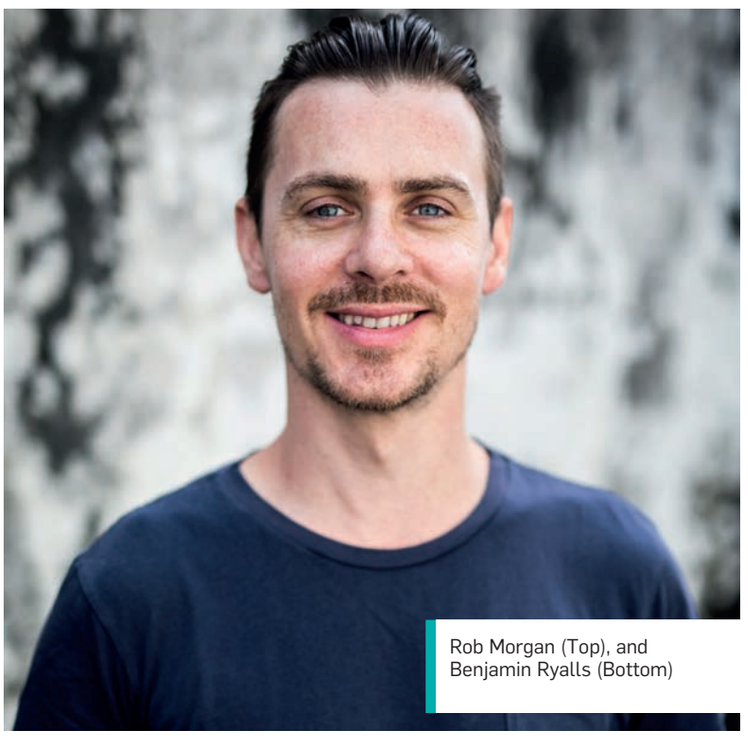
"I've done jobs that I'd describe as narrative design without being hired under that title, and I've been hired under that title to do work that I wouldn't describe as narrative design. But that's because the definition lags behind the skillset, and even further behind the need for the skillset."

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

In the past five years alone, games have leaped from where they were with different mediums like VR creating more immersive experiences. Even FMV has returned to great effect.

"Not only has narrative design experienced democratisation through more easily accessible free tools for producing high quality solo content, but in general, studios increasingly view writing and narrative design as an intrinsic part of the game development process. Writers are often employed at earlier stages of projects to help shape the overall game and story design rather than being parachuted in at the last minute to fix pre-existing text," says Ryalls. "VR, AR, mobile and the rise of procedural generation have also created unique challenges and opportunities for narrative design."

"Increased demand for cross-platform accessibility has presented challenges to narrative designers who need to make sure the player journey rolls seamlessly between devices," says Amiqus' Liz Prince. "This is further complicated by the different levels of capability, all of which are evolving. Alongside developments in technical capability, narrative design has become a central component of new depths in immersive storytelling. The player experience has always been highly influenced by the expectation of the day, and the bar has been raising on production design value both in games and other story driven leisure genres such as TV drama."



Rob Morgan (Top), and Benjamin Ryalls (Bottom)

"I think there are greater expectations now on the part of players about the role storytelling can play," adds Rebellion's Colin Harvey. "Of course it's partly budgetary, with the bigger companies able to throw more money at having multiple people working on the narrative side, but it's also about getting the right systems in place so story is working hand in hand with the other elements.

"I also think there's going to be increasing emphasis on the 'transmedia' side, with the narrative designer/writer being expected to expand the story universe beyond the game and into other media like comics, novels, alternative reality games, or at least work with other creators to do that."

GETTING STARTED

Starting as a writer is a big help, but traditional writing such as novels might not be enough, as David Varela from the Avron writing course explains.

"Interactivity, the idea of giving agency to your reader, to your audience, is a big difference for conventional writers," Varela says. "That sense that you can give your audience agency, and a role in the story without it becoming a branching narrative. It doesn't have to be a 'choose your own adventure', there are other types of interactivity that you can include. That degree of interactivity that you are giving your players is in itself an artistic choice you are making as an author.

"They also might not fully understand the power of game mechanics to tell a story. If you look at *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*, it does beautiful things with game mechanics that are difficult to articulate in any other medium. It works incredibly well. Or *Device 6* where you are using the mechanics of the device to tell the story.

"Environmental storytelling is something that they don't necessarily understand. The idea that you can explore a space, fill a set with clues. Writers from different backgrounds, from theatre and film, might understand that better. But it's a skill that's particularly useful in games."

"Narrative design is second fiddle to nobody," says Rob Morgan. "And it's not just a middleman either. However, bear in mind that as a specialism it usually only has openings in large projects with a large amount of content to manage. On smaller projects the job is usually divvied up between story and design."

"There are no easy routes," admits Rebellion's Harvey. "Doing a course in screenwriting or creative writing can help, or specialising in game narrative as part of a game design degree.

"Some people come in via other media like comics or film, but of course you need to establish yourself in those media first. If you're suitably enterprising, getting a job in QA and then chatting with the narrative designer/game writer might pay dividends."

However, as is often the case, the best approach may just be to start writing as Obsidian Entertaiment's creative director Chris Avellone concludes. "If you want to make games or break into the gaming field as a writer, get started right now. No excuses. There is very little preventing anyone from designing and writing for games via mods and seeing that on a resume/portfolio moves those applicants to the top." ■

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

The latest high-profile hires and promotions

PLAYSTACK

Former Gamespot and Develop editor, Rob Crossley, has joined publisher Playstack as head of developer partnerships. This follows his previous role as head of games at Creative England. Crossley is currently looking for new games to join the Playstack Family.

"At PlayStack my search for developer partnerships will go beyond regional and national borders to every platform and every geography," said Crossley I want to speak to any and every developer with a game or even an idea who is seeking support, feedback, and investment."

MOVERS AND SHAKERS: IN BRIEF

- Former EA dev Amy Kalson joins Danish studio, SYBO.
- Ubisoft creative director, Jason VandenBerghe, joins ArenaNet
- Director Steven ter Heide leaves Guerrilla Games.
- Arron Flynn (pictured) leaves Bioware with Casey Hudson returning.
- Jim Woods joins Supermassive Games from Sega.
- John Clark and Tim Heaton become executive vice presidents at Sega.
- Hanger 13 designer Harrison Pink joins Blizzard as *Diablo's* senior designer.
- Blizzard sound director, Russell Brower, leaves following a restructure.
- GDC orgnaiser UBM names Katie Stern as new GDC general manager.

LINX AGENCY

Linx is a new agency for video games writers founded by Benjamin Ryalls. The agency will collaborate with outsourcring companies in all production as well as represent creative writers for the medium, giving publishers and developers great writing talent.

"I'm excited to launch Linx and help game developers realise their visions," said Ryalls, who is also creative director. "The Linx Agency's growing talent roster of professional writers means that we can deliver on all aspects of creative writing for games; from narrative design, consultancy, world building, character creation, dialogue and more."

Looking for a creative writer to bring your next game to life?
LINX AGENCY
The Linx Agency represents some of the world's leading writers, with decades of experience in crafting unforgettable stories from indie games to AAA productions.
www.brlinx.com
writers@brlinx.com
+44 (0) 7876 540 025

GET THAT **JOB**

This month: James Brady - Envrionment artist, PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds

What is your job role?
I am currently a freelance environment artist for Bluehole Ginno on its latest early access release *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*. Prior to this, I was working at Rockstar Games and Creative Assembly.

What qualifications and/or experience do you need?
Getting into the games industry as an artist usually does not require an educational background. I am self taught with no degree.

I think the most important thing is to not only be passionate about making video game art but also to be committed and be willing to put the work in to achieve becoming that.

The art spectrum in the industry is also very broad. This ranges from vegetation art, weapon art, asset art to lighting art. I would recommend trying each of these areas out, you will quickly find yourself honing in on a specific area that you naturally feel comfortable working on.

Having the right contacts is important as this allows you get a possible foot in the door with a studio. To do this I would recommend joining a site such as Polycount. This website allows you to post work in progress shots of your portfolio work and receive feedback from experienced industry artists.

This will allow you the opportunity to learn industry standard tools and workflows for the specific area that you have chosen to specialise in.

I would also recommend visiting a well known games industry educational website called 80level. This website is filled with educational tutorials tips and techniques provided by artists who have experience in the common industry practices. It's a must for budding artists and students.

If you were interviewing someone, what do you look for?
I'd first and foremost look to see if the applicant has not only a passion for video game art but is someone who is passionate about the studio of which he or she has applied to. This would be visible in their portfolio. I always recommend to budding artists or students to aim their portfolio work towards the art style of the studio they wish to join.

> "I'd look to see if the applicant is passionate about the studio

Secondly I would look for a willingness to learn and to see if they would want to climb the art ranks within the studio. Lastly I would also look to see if they are a self-starter who can work independently and have the confidence to meet deadlines under pressure, while taking on board feedback to help them progress.

Showing confidence along with a full understanding of the job you are applying for is also key.

What opportunities are there for career progression?
There is a vast range of progressive routes. If an individual enters as a junior environment artist, they can climb to an environment artist followed by a senior environment artist, which focuses on a specific area like those mentioned earlier.

If they show leadership skills and work well in stressful situations they can climb to a lead environment artist role and manage the specific areas. ■

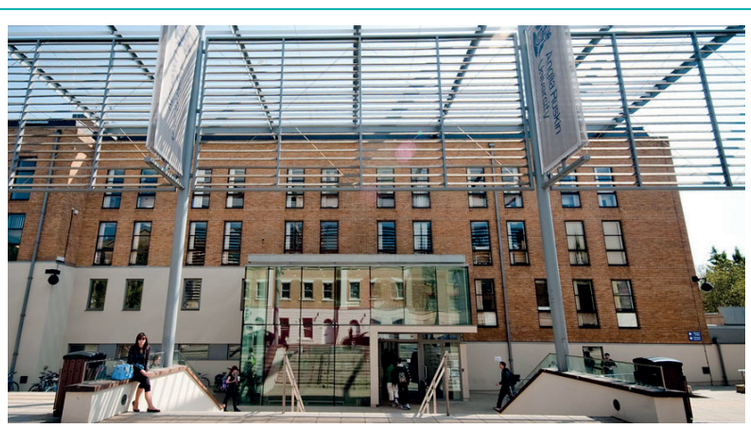
SKILLS AND **TRAINING**

This month: Dr. Baris Isikguner explains what the benefits are of studying with Anglia Ruskin University, home of the Brains Eden games festival

Overview: Anglia Ruskin University BA and MA in games design and art, and BSc and MSc in programming
Address: Anglia Ruskin University, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT
T: 01245 493131
E: answers@anglia.ac.uk
W: www.anglia.ac.uk/csa

Cambridge is known as the home to Frontier Developments, Jagex and to recent Develop Award winning Ghost Town Games. It's also home to the Brains Eden student games festival held at Anglia Ruskin University.

The university is known for courses in many of the arts and sciences, but also offers many game courses. "We have an MA and BA at the Cambridge School of Art and an MSc and a BSc at the Faculty of Science and Technology, focusing on two distinctive skillsets within games art and programming," says Dr Baris Isikguner, course leader computer games art and development.



Much like the Brains Eden festival, Anglia Ruskin University has many ties with the industry, both locally in Cambridge and throughout the UK as well as even further afield. "As one of the few TIGA accredited game art courses we are well within that community, working closely with our partners, including Sony, Frontier, Jagex, Original Force and Sumo," says Dr. Isikguner. And the quality of the equipment on hand is second to none.

"Students have access to all the required hardware and software that industry may ask of them," he says, with both Unity and Unreal Engines available to use as well as a dedication motion capture setup.

"We have a 16 camera Opti Track MoCap suit, development machines, VR equipment, graphic and tablet Wacom Cintiqs and up to date workstations, with all the software modern industry use." Students also get the chance to work on games for projects. One lecturer at the university demonstrated to me the work between the game design and animation departments to create a 2D endless runner project.

"We have live briefs which allow them to work and produce games assets for our industry partners," says Dr. Isikguner. "For example the last second year brief we've completed with Sony was for the Guerrilla Cambridge developed game, *RIGS*."

There's a lot of technology and hands on experience. So what else do students get?

"We have a one-on-one intensive teaching structure with industry focused briefs and cross faculty collaborative modules within our courses," Dr. Isikguner adds. "Therefore students gain industry experience through their education." ■

RECRUITER **HOT** SEAT: **CODEMASTERS**

Recruitment resourcer, **Simon Mignott**, talks us through the benefits of working for the veteran developer and what you need in order to be passionate about for the studio's current projects

CURRENTLY HIRING

Company: Codemasters
Locations: Southam, Birmingham and Cheshire.
Hiring: Design, production, programming and more
Where to apply: www.codemasters.com/careers

What differentiates your studio from other developers?

We take great pride in creating a company culture that makes Codemasters a great place to work for all of our exceptionally talented and passionate teams, which is reflected in the quality and continued success of our award-winning racing games.

This continued success is a powerful and inspiring force that has made Codemasters one of the UK's leading games developers for over 30 years.

Our mission is to become the world's leading racing studio, by creating great games that last forever and connecting with players around the world. We are very proud of the games we make, including our exclusive partnership with Formula One Motorsport on the official *Formula One* games, the much loved *Micro Machines* games, and our very own award winning *Dirt* and *Grid* franchises. We are developing innovative new projects and new IP behind-the-scenes right now, so it's a very exciting time for the company.

How many staff are you looking to take on?

We're always looking for talented people to join our family and right now we're looking for various talented individuals to work on new projects for our development teams in Southam HQ in Warwickshire, Birmingham, and Codemasters EVO in Cheshire.

What perks are available to working at your studio?

Our perks are focused around our commitment to staff development, nurturing talent and developing skills. We focus on career development plans, training and learning new skills to make sure our staff get the most from their careers.

We believe that having a healthy lifestyle is important too, and we have a brand new state of the art onsite gym at our HQ in Southam.

Across all studios we have launch events, company parties, research trips and regular involvement across a lot of industry events and game jams.

We also have perks that include free fruit, hot drinks, kitchen areas and free games. Other benefits include healthcare, employee assistance program, pension, life assurance, cycle to work scheme, childcare schemes and flexible working arrangements.

What should aspiring devs do with their CV to get an interview?

It sounds obvious, but it will help you get an interview if you take the time to make sure your CV highlights your skills, experience and personal projects fit with the details provided in the job description.

If you're new to the industry and you don't have experience on your side, then make sure your personal projects and passion for gaming shines through.

It also helps if you can showcase your skills through your social media profiles, website or portfolio, so make sure to include links to them.

What advice would you give for a successful interview at your studio?

Prepare well and be honest and open about yourself. We want to get to know what drives you, what your passions are and what you want to achieve with us. Remember that the interview is an opportunity for us to get to know each other, so we want it to be a two way conversation and would love for you to prepare your own questions for us.

> **Make sure your passion for gaming shines through**
> *Simon Mignott*

I would recommend you carefully check that your experience to date matches your job title, without overestimating or underestimating your abilities. A keen interest or passion for gaming and racing helps.

If you have recruited internationally what is the process like?

We do everything we can to make the transition as smooth and comfortable as possible. We provide and assist with relocation expenses, help with accommodation and work with you on applications for visas.

For families, we help with finding schools and job opportunities for partners. Anything to make the transition a comfortable one.

It simply starts with a Skype call, where we have a chat to get to know each other, and talk about the studio, culture and role. Then we'll arrange a visit to the studio, to take a tour of the company, to give you a good feel before you settle in.

How has recruitment needs change at your studio?

Codemasters success means we are expanding in many areas. We are also looking to grow talent from within, creating a framework for apprenticeships, building connections with universities and hiring talented graduates who are keen to succeed. ■

Follow us at: **@develop_jobs #DevelopJobs**
To see our full jobs board, sign up for our jobs newsletter or to post your own job ads, visit: **www.develop-online.net/jobs**

ASK AMIQUS

Liz Prince, business manager at recruitment specialist Amiqus, helps solve some of the trickier problems job seekers currently face in the games industry

Q What should my studio or my project consider when looking to employ a writer or narrative designer?

Whenever you're hiring for a studio or project there are some staple considerations. How long you will need someone for? What employment model is most cost-effective? What level of experience is necessary? Can anyone in your existing team can step up to the plate? The recruitment of key hires will have an enormous impact on your game and this is particularly true of writers and narrative designers. With this in mind, where should studios start when recruiting them?

DECIDE WHAT YOUR GAME NEEDS

"The first thing to consider is what your product really requires, as the roles of writer and narrative designer are quite different," says Phil Harris, senior narrative designer at BigPoint. "Although the difference in these roles is often poorly defined.

"A writer creates text within a game world, which can range from the description a player reads when they click on an icon to the flowing conversational dialogue between two characters, or the description of a vast fortress in the game. A narrative designer is a more specialised role, directly involved in the creation of the game world. They create the 'machinery' that makes the world, working with the designers, artists, developers and producers to understand what is possible and how they can adapt their ideas to fit within the technical limitations of the game engine. They also maintain the canon of the product, so if the product is revisited, consistency is maintained."

GET THE TIMING RIGHT

Writers are often recruited after the start of product development with freelance and remote working being common employment models. Narrative designers on the other hand are typically needed from the initial inception of a product, as they are integral to the creation of the game.

"Ideally and most fundamentally, get the Narrative Designer in at the beginning of the project," agrees Colin Harvey, narrative designer at Rebellion. "That way they can help shape the project and make sure everything is suitably integrated from the get-go. If you don't have existing processes for creating story, be prepared to let the narrative designer help establish those."

However, as we all know, unforeseen issues mean it's often necessary to deviate from the plan. Though your game vision is a cornerstone of any project, Harvey has some advice should things go wrong.

"If you absolutely have to bring a narrative designer in part way through the project, be prepared to be flexible with the overall vision. They will do their best to stitch together what you've already got, but there's got to be some give and take to make the vision the best it possibly can be."

> **Narrative is half science, half art. Don't hire a scientist without soul.**
> *Rob Yescombe, writer and narrative designer*

ENSURE TEAM INTEGRATION

Being able to bring elements together is a key competency to look for when hiring and you'll need to decide how you are going to assess candidates for these attributes. A good recruitment agency can provide some guidance here. Freelance narrative designer Anthony Jauneaud believes that a person specification as well as a skills list is key.

"A writer on a video game project should be a people's person. They should be able to communicate with coders, artists, designers and producers. This is crucial. Narration is information, so they should be updated with changes."

Competency-based interview questions around examples of where your designer has deployed soft-skills will help you pull out the capability of your candidate. It's also a good idea to take up references about their style and approach so that you can find out how they are likely to function.

WHAT KIND OF PROJECT

Ultimately the kind of game you want to create will heavily inform your choice of hire. Experience in the genre or style you're developing will mean a writer or designer has proven their ability in line with your vision. That said, many studios enjoy a totally fresh approach so it's worth assessing personal portfolios.

It's possible to pitch for a share in an increasingly competitive market by challenging the status quo and experimenting. "If you own your own IP, be prepared to think radically about it," says Colin Harvey. "Are there fundamental things that need to be changed to get it to work? If possible build in development time to test story ideas, do table read-throughs and see what works and what doesn't. Players have high expectations and will expect plotting and characterisation to be on a par with what they see in the cinema and on Netflix."

CONCLUSION

"The real importance of narrative design is player engagement," says Bigpoint's Harris. "If the world doesn't work beneath the surface, the spell you hope the player is under can be broken. If you plan to produce a game with a strong story element like a third person action adventure, an MMORPG, a multi-media launch or a series, you should probably consider hiring a narrative designer."

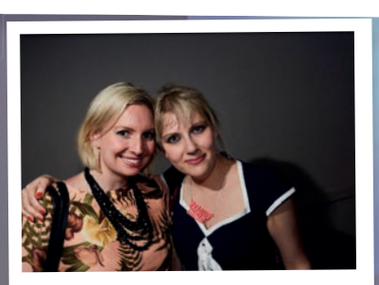
"Narrative is half science, half art," concludes Rob Yescombe, writer of *Rime* and *Farpoint*. "Don't hire a scientist without soul, and don't hire an artiste who can't explain their methods." ■

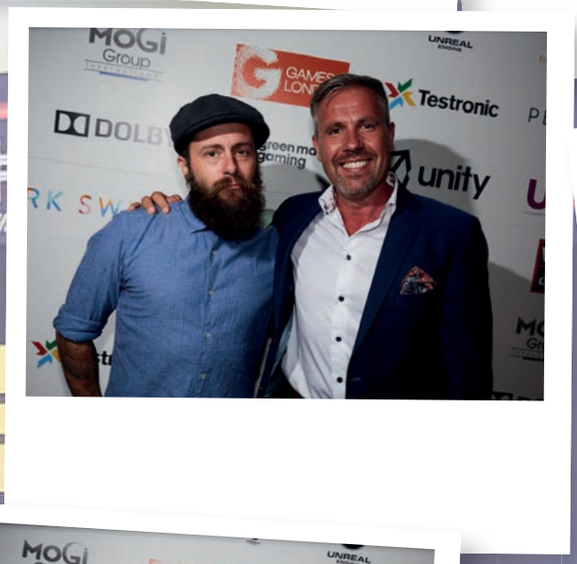
Liz Prince, business manager at recruitment specialist Amiqus, helps solve some of the trickier problems job seekers currently face in the games industry

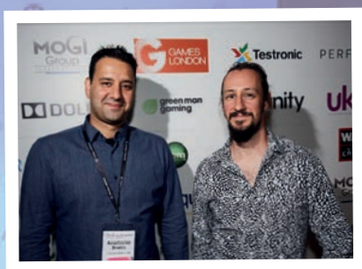
amiqus Visit **amiqus.com** for a fresh perspective on games recruitment

IT'S PARTY TIME!!!

We all had a great time at the **Develop Awards** and, by the looks of it, so did all of you! Here's some pictures from the Awards ceremony...







You can find all of these pictures and more by visiting: **www.facebook.com/developonline**

GAME FOR A **LAUGH**

Indie developer Byron Atkinson-Jones is going on stage to tell jokes in the name of charity. This month, he gets some mentoring advice from Stand Up for GamesAid host, Imran Yusuf

It's a month closer to me having to get up on stage in front of the games industry and attempt to make them laugh. You've all given generously to my insanity, right? No? Well what are you waiting for! Head on over to https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/byron-atkinson-jones and donate all your life's savings (or at least £10) now!

It's been a busy month. Mostly me fighting the rising panic, usually when I'm about to try and go to sleep at night and I remember I'm doing this thing. The host and organizer of Stand Up for GamesAid, Imran Yusuf has agreed to mentor me in preparation for the night, but who is Imran?

Who are you and what's your link to the games industry?
I'm Imran Yusuf and I used to work in the games industry.

Tell me more, what were you? A coder? Artist? Producer?
I started off my games industry career as a games analyst at Midway games back in 2000 and then became an assistant producer. Then I ended up as a games tester, a specialist games tester, lead tester and then back to assistant producer in freelance and then a stand-up comedian.

That's a heck of a journey, how did you go from working in the games industry to becoming a stand-up comedian?
Initially my dream as a kid was to make videogames so I got into the games industry. Although I learned a lot and I had good times, I also had tough times. I also wanted to be a stand-up comedian for a very long time and eventually the ability to have unmitigated creative freedom on stage was so overwhelming I had to make the move. You can do as you please and say what you want as long as you get results, you don't have to ask permission.

> Initally my dream as a kid was to make videogames so I got in to the industry
> *Imran Yusuf, Stand Up for GamesAid host*

(That sounds a lot like some of the reasons I became an indie developer, not having to ask permission to do things and having ultimate creative freedom. I do miss money though, I occasionally go to shops to see strangers hand it over the counter just to remind myself what it looks like – Byron Atkinson-Jones)

Rumour has it you're moving into TV – something about a QA sitcom?
Yes, I'm making a sitcom at the moment, based largely on my experience as a games tester. Mostly at Sega although I was a tester at Eidos and Argonaut and at Kuju. I've written it with my co-writer Tim Clark who's a veteran stand-up comedian and it's being produced by Hugo Sieoro who used to work at Sega with me.

The sitcom is called Quality Assurance about games testers and we will be shooting the teaser trailer in September at Sega.

Wow, are the stories going to be based on events that happened to you in the games industry? Are you going to have hitmen after you?
There's definitely going to be incidents that were inspired by things that happened to me so they will feature quite heavily.

This is our love letter to the games industry so people will find this sitcom totally relevant to their experience and authentic because I've worked in both publishing and development so it's a world I understand intimately well, not only as a professional but as a gamer.

I'm doing this completely insane thing where I'll be on the stage at the Comedy Store doing a comedy routine in front of the games industry in the name of charity. What tips can you give me to avoid dying on the night?
Have fun! The number one golden rule that was taught to me by Mr Ian Stone who's a veteran comic was 'have fun'. That's the core of everything we do. Obviously put some time and effort into writing your material and do some practice gigs and get used to knowing how to handle yourself, how to present yourself to a crowd, but remember to do it from a place of fun.

Focus on that, if you have a good time they'll have a good time. In fact, I think that's the secret to life. If you are constantly worrying for validation from other people and hoping that they like you then you're going to put yourself into a very precarious situation. Whereas if you focus on you rather than them, and if you are having fun, others will have fun too. ■

To donate, please visit:
www.justgiving.com/fundraising/byron-atkinson-jones

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